The New Criterion

November 1995

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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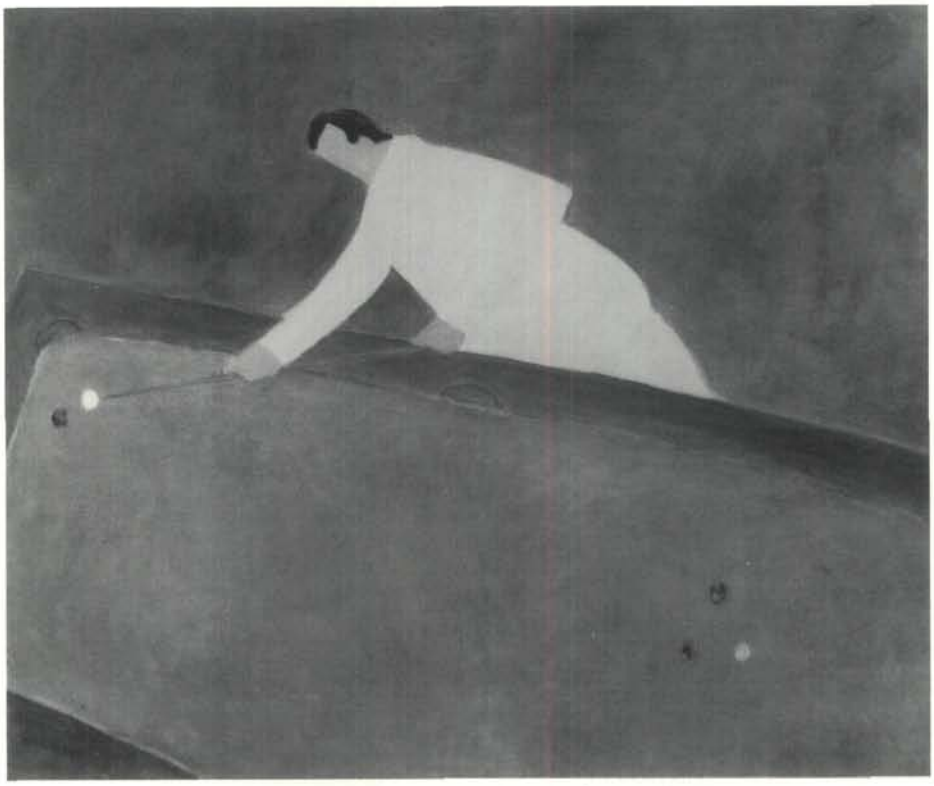

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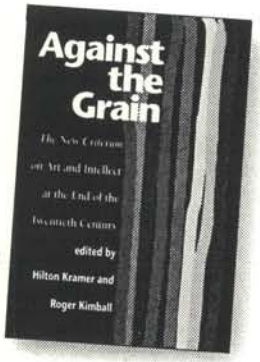

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The New Criterion *November 1995*

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Mark Steyn hosted this summer's Glyndebourne Opera broadcasts on London's Channel 4.
Richard Tillinghast's latest book of poems, *The Stonecutter's Hand*, was published earlier this year by David R. Godine.
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Notes & Comments: November 1995

Tracking the flight from reason

The intellectual Luddites are at it again. Anyone who has followed the orgy of fatuousness that has swept through American colleges and universities since the 1960s knows that this corrosive frivolity has lately expanded beyond the humanities and social sciences to attack mathematics and the natural sciences as well. The multiculturalists, post-structuralists, eco-feminists, Afrocentrists, and New Historicists—not to mention many old-time Marxists and up-to-date connoisseurs of "Queer Theory"—have established a new front in their assault on rationality and tradition. No longer are they content to deconstruct Henry James and castigate the Western humanistic legacy as a white, patriarchal, imperialist conspiracy designed to corroborate class privilege and "compulsory hetrosexuality." Their befuddling glare now seeks also to challenge the essential cogency of scientific method and mathematical reasoning. Hence the plethora of disquisitions by celebrated academics on "feminist algebra," the ways in which Newton's *Principia* is really a "rape manual," and the happy thought that early African writings "indicate a possible understanding of quantum physics and gravitational theory."

Note well: such unlovely nonsense is put forward not by obscure cranks scribbling in pencil on lined paper in public libraries but by highly-paid tenured professors at premier institutions. These are the men and women we dower with lavish professorships and a great deal of leisure in order, partly, that they may share the fruits of their study and reflection with young students. In short, we have entrusted them with transmitting the intellectual and moral riches of our civilization. It is a trust that many have brutally betrayed. Recently, some commentators have suggested that conservatives ought to celebrate rather than criticize the absurdity and hermeticism of fashionable academic discourse, reasoning that its very opacity and muddle-headedness will naturally limit the influence of the underlying ideas. Would that this were so. Unfortunately, absurdity has never been an impediment to influence. We could justly ignore—or applaud—what is happening in the academy only if we were prepared to write off a generation of students and, indeed, only if we believed that what happens in our educational institutions did not matter.

But of course it does matter. Which is why most right-thinking observers continue, correctly, to be appalled by the *débâcle* that has shaken our universities. Regarding the assault on science by the academic left, the biologist Paul R. Gross and the mathematician Norman Levitt delivered a devastating fusillade in 1994 when they published their book *Higher Superstition*. In all essentials, *Higher Superstition* provided an un-

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answerable dissection of the ideological nonsense that masquerades under the name of "science studies." Messrs. Gross and Levitt took on the social constructionists, the feminists, the Afrocentrists, the neo-Marxists, the environmentalists, the post-structuralists one by one. They were fair but firm. They did not hesitate to expose ignorance and pretension for what they were or to ridicule what was ridiculous. They proceeded with the analytic clarity of Euclid and the rhetorical zest of Gilbert and Sullivan. It was a brilliant performance, invigorating in its Swiftean pugnacity. When they finished with their opponents, their opponents were finished.

Or so one would have thought. Alas, as we had occasion to observe last February in our report on the 1994 convention of the Modern Language Association, the entrenched ideologues of the academic left continue unfazed in their bleatings about the "gendering" of scientific discourse, the malevolence of the ideal of objectivity, and the instability of truth. It is hardly surprising that *Higher Superstition* and its authors were prime objects of obloquy at the MLA. Nor, we suppose, was it surprising that neither Mr. Gross nor Mr. Levitt had been invited to participate in the "discussion"—that is, the attempted assassination of their work: academic "critics" of science may be pernicious, but they are not suicidal. In content, the attacks on *Higher Superstition* were little more than so many exercises in ritual exorcism. The charges brought by Messrs. Gross and Levitt were not answered but merely abused.

The problem is that this strategy of substituting exorcism for argument is spreading. Witness Andrew Ross, the high-profile academic Marxist who teaches literature at New York University (having been lured away from Princeton) and who recently told *New York* magazine that he had more or less given up reading books in favor of television and pop culture. Professor Ross's book *Strange Weather: Culture, Science, and Technology in the Age of Limits*—a model of ideological animus dressed up as criticism—was a prime target of *Higher Superstition*. As we reported, at the MLA Professor Ross was full of sound and fury, denouncing *Higher Superstition*, its authors, and sundry other critics of the academy, including the editors of *The New Criterion*.

Now Professor Ross is back. In the October 2 issue of *The Nation*, he reports on a conference sponsored by the New York Academy of Sciences last June called "The Flight from Science and Reason." Although it included some critics of the scientific establishment, the guiding themes of the conference were set by Messrs. Gross and Levitt and their book. Professor Ross begins with some familiar left-wing throat-clearing: he conjures up "the pit-bull moralizing of the Buchanans, Doles, and Gramms," derides E. O. Wilson's sociobiology as "a classic product of the mentality of militarist science," and vaporizes about evils of "corporate capitalism." But his main point is that Western science with its ideals of disinterestedness and objectivity must be overturned in favor of a vision of science that is more amenable to progressive politics. Accordingly, he celebrates "scholars" such as Donna Haraway and Evelyn Fox Keller "who uncover the gender-laden and racist assumptions built into the Euro-American scientific method."

Some readers may be wondering what in heaven's name the "Euro-American" scientific method might be—isn't the scientific method as valid in the Third World as in the First or Second? Indeed, isn't it just such universality that makes it . . . scientific? But wait, there are also such seers as "Sandra Harding, who favor pro-democracy approaches to objectivity." Unlike, you understand, an anti-democratic approach to objectivity, which would be . . . what? Never mind: Professor Ross looks forward to "new scientific methods rooted in the social needs of communities and accountable to interests other than those of managerial elites in business, government, and the military." What about the old scientific

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method that was accountable to reality? Professor Ross doesn't mention this because, like the Sixties radicals he imitates, he prefers talking about "proletarianization of scientific labor." He demands "science for the people" and a "Third World movement for indigenous technoscience that is sustainable and appropriate, rooted in local knowledge and local resources." He acknowledges that technical expertise may be a nice thing but asks: "how much do you need to know technically about nuclear fission to conclude that nuclear energy is a socially destructive idea?" (Answer: a lot more than Professor Ross.)

And on it goes: driveling neo-Marxist pablum surrounded by a bit of fancy lit-crit watercress. In short, Professor Ross, like the other denizens of "science studies" he mentions, doesn't know what he is talking about. Less sophomoric, but just as wrongheaded was the opinion piece by Daniel Lee Kleinman in the September 29 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. It, too, took off from the conference on "The Flight from Science and Reason." Professor Kleinman, who teaches sociology at the University of Georgia, has three basic points. In the first place, he charges that Messrs. Gross and Levitt and their like-minded colleagues "deploy exactly the same kind of overblown rhetoric of which they are so critical in others." They use, he says, "half-truths and caricature rather than reason and logic." Well. *Higher Superstition* certainly contains some delicious caricature—but half-truths or misrepresentations? Professor Kleinman does not make his case. And on the question of rhetoric: what Messrs. Gross and Levitt contest in others is not overblown rhetoric but ignorance. They can be brutal, it is true; but entrenched intellectual posturing cannot be dispelled by polite sallies: it must be uprooted by a combination of unsparing analysis and ridicule. Messrs. Gross and Levitt provide ample quantities of both.

Professor Kleinman's second point is that the assault on science by the academic left has been "quite effective" in undermining the "idealized image" of science. But has it? Professor Kleinman, like Andrew Ross, seems to have trouble distinguishing between what scientists do *qua* scientists and as actors in the mundane world of institutional life. No one would deny that politics, ambition, and *parti-pris* can shape the institutional structure of scientific research—determining, for example, what and who gets funding. That is a simple truism. But Professor Kleinman, again like Andrew Ross, goes much further. He wants sociology to illuminate not only the institutional structure but also the content, the truth value, of scientific research. In one hectic moment, he even assures us that "experiments are rarely decisive in settling scientific controversies." Really? Tell that to Galileo, Newton, Descartes, Pasteur, or Einstein.

Professor Kleinman shares a disease common among academic humanists today: a reflexive commitment to relativism that blinds him to the claims of truth. In one revealing passage, he notes that, "unlike God, we cannot see everything at once. If we look at something from one place, we cannot see it from others. And perspective matters. Thus we cannot, by definition, be objective." But in fact, it was precisely through a meditation on perspective, in the Renaissance, that the ideal of objectivity as such was first articulated. Recognition of the limits of perspective was the catalyst for moving beyond those limits. Not that any human being can achieve perfect objectivity. But the ideal of objectivity remains, guiding science and allowing us to distinguish between descriptions of reality that are better and worse, more or less objective.

Professor Kleinman's third point concerns status and prestige. "Scientists," he says, "must realize that they are not automatically entitled to a social status that places them beyond oversight and reproach." He is certainly correct about this. But what scientist believes otherwise? Cer-

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tainly not Messrs. Gross or Levitt. Indeed, in the last chapter of *Higher Superstition* they endorse a "serious investigation of the interplay of cultural and social factors with the workings of scientific research." They note, however, that the success of any such endeavor requires "patience, subtlety, erudition, and a knowledge of human nature." "Above all," they conclude, "it requires an intimate appreciation of the science in question." Professor Kleinman overlooks this requirement; Andrew Ross and his ilk hold it in contempt. But that is one reason their criticism has forfeited any claim to legitimacy.

Critics as connoisseurs of . . . what?

Almost worse than some of the degraded pictures that nowadays deface the art scene and demoralize the public is some of the criticism that is written to justify them. And we don't mean the kind of criticism that is confined to obscurantist academic journals. Today the practice of praising, well, *crap*, has entered the mainstream, as we were recently appalled to discover in, of all places, London's two leading conservative newspapers, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph*, on the occasion of a new exhibition devoted to the work of Gilbert & George. Please forgive the language, but the exhibition was called "Gilbert & George: The Naked Shit Pictures."

It needs to be pointed out, perhaps, for those who do not keep up with such esoteric matters, that the copious team of Gilbert & George enjoys a celebrity on the London art scene somewhat akin to that of the late Andy Warhol. Many people regard them, indeed, as having produced some of the greatest British art of our time. Their pictures consist of huge, brilliantly colored Pop photo-murals of themselves and others usually engaged in activities guaranteed to shock public taste. For their admirers, this is what constitutes their primary appeal.

With "The Naked Shit Pictures," shown with much fanfare earlier this fall at the South London Gallery, they would appear to have outdone all their previous attempts to, as we might say, impose their excrement upon an adoring public. For as Richard Dorment, the art critic of *The Daily Telegraph*, wrote in praise of the exhibition, it "contains nothing but mural-size pictures of the artists—sometimes nude, sometimes clothed—and their faeces."

Warming to his encomiastic task, Mr. Dorment went on to declare that "far from being gratuitously offensive, these pictures are the contemporary equivalent of medieval representations of human corpses in the process of decomposition." (Earlier on, he had invoked the Isenheim altarpeice as an appropriate precedent.) "If this particular series is about the lowest of man's bodily functions," Mr. Dorment observed, "then there are others which are about hope, religion, patriotism and idealism. Seen in isolation, the Naked Shit Pictures are obscene. But seen as part of a much larger mosaic exploring the reality of what it is to be human, it is more accurate to describe them as inevitable."

John McEwen, writing in *The Sunday Telegraph*, went even further by praising what he described as Gilbert & George's "self-sacrifice for a higher cause, which is purposely moral and indeed Christian." Mr. McEwen seems to have meant it, for he then went on to say that "the evangelical point is confirmed by references to the Crucifixion and the Garden of Eden, where the seed of shame was sown. That these cruciforms are composed of photographs of the artists' shit, literally of their own faeces, is their ultimate assault on conformity." Mr. McEwen *was* indignant about one thing, however—what he described as the "virtual embargo" that the major television networks, and the BBC in particular, had imposed on showing "The Naked Shit Pictures" on their screens.

As we say, there are times when the criticism is worse than the . . . art?

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Elena Tsezarevna Chukovskaya
by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Editor's note: This memoir of Elena Tsezarevna Chukovskaya and the forthcoming book from which it is drawn take us back to the tumultuous period before Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was officially charged with treason by the Soviet authorities and expelled from the Soviet Union in February 1974. Nearly twenty years earlier—in February 1956—Nikita Khrushchev had delivered his historic denunciation of Stalin's crimes to the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and in the course of the so-called "Thaw" that followed upon that fateful event Solzhenitsyn emerged, with the official publication of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, as the leader of the internal intellectual opposition to the Soviet regime.

When the Thaw proved to be short-lived and a new crackdown was enforced on Soviet life, Solzhenitsyn's position proved to be extremely precarious. Yet he responded to this dangerous situation by conducting an open campaign of opposition, with his public "Letter to the Soviet Leaders" (1973) and the other activities that are recounted in *The Oak and the Calf: Sketches of Literary Life in the Soviet Union* (written in 1974 and published here in 1980), while at the same time completing several of his major works—most notably, the three volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago*. Those works could only be preserved, copied, and circulated by clandestine means, however, and for that purpose Solzhenitsyn was obliged to depend on an underground network of allies within the Soviet Union itself.

Solzhenitsyn recounted the story of his open opposition to the Soviet establishment in *The Oak and the Calf*. But the publication of his moving account of the extensive "underground" network that supported him during this precarious and amazingly productive period had to be delayed, of course, in order to protect the many individuals who served his cause at great risk to themselves. Like *The Oak and the Calf*, this book, called *Invisible Allies*—in which this portrait of the devoted Lyusha Chukovskaya is a major chapter—was written in Zurich in the immediate aftermath of his expulsion from his native Russia, and thus before he took up residence in the United States. Unless otherwise noted, the footnotes are by the translators, Alexis Klimoff and Michael Nicholson.

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From the end of 1965 for a period of almost five years, Lyusha Chukovskaya stood in the eye of the storm, at the heart of the vortex that engulfed me. During those years she was the point of intersection for every strand, every contact, for everything that needed asking, answering, or transmitting. Then, for a further three years, right up to the moment of my exile, a good many of our communications continued to be routed through her. In this book, whenever I write "we decided," "we did it," "we overlooked," "we never thought," that "we," for several years on end, meant Lyusha and me. Everyone in our immediate circle was aware of this, even those who were not part of the conspiracy, and if Lyusha telephoned someone unexpectedly insisting that they come and see her, or suddenly and unceremoniously invited herself round to their home, then everyone understood at once that it was either I who was inviting them or who was coming to see them, or else that Lyusha was coming on urgent business from me. She was in effect my chief of staff —or, rather, my whole staff rolled into one (as the KGB, alas, gradually came to understand full well). One particular reason was that at this time I was living sometimes in Ryazan and sometimes just outside Moscow but never in the capital itself—yet it was in Moscow, where she lived, that things were constantly happening, and it was there that they needed to be resolved.

Lyusha was the granddaughter of the writer Kornei Ivanovich Chukovsky.[1] There were four other grandchildren, but Lyusha was his favorite. She was utterly devoted to his work and helped him a great deal. She specialized in chemistry and after her postgraduate studies was awarded an advanced degree, whereupon she began a successful scientific career. There too she distinguished herself with her capacity for hard work, her thoroughness and accuracy, her love of order, and her inability to leave any job half done. (It is the same the whole world over: the irresponsible ones can never get down to their work, it rolls off them like water off a duck's back, while the conscientious few get to do the work of several people and are forever taking on extra chores.) As if this were not enough, Lyusha had for many years been compensating for the unfulfilling nature of her work at the institute by spending the weekends out at Peredelkino, acting as a secretary for her grandfather. Flinging herself into the task of helping with his correspondence and putting his files in order, she transformed these gloomy days of rest into the most energetic and constructive time of all, gladdening the heart of her grandfather, who was a hard-working man himself. (How well I understand and share his feelings.)

This work was interrupted when Lyusha, by now thirty-three years old, suffered a tragic loss, a devastating crisis that left her family fearing for her life—and which indeed she barely survived. In the autumn of 1965, while she was still convalescing, she returned from the Crimea and on her first trip out to Peredelkino learned that Kornei Ivanovich had offered me shelter after the seizure of my literary archive. This was a time when I, too, was in the depths of despondency. (With this gesture he helped me through the weeks of unrelieved danger and dejection.) From time to time he would take advantage of his standing as the virtual dean of Soviet literature in order to come to the defense of persecuted individuals or even of those under arrest; he would sign petitions on their behalf or make a phone call to someone "upstairs," but these were essentially personal interventions and he did not let himself be drawn into public polemics. Moreover, Chukovsky never lost his sense of the Russian literary heritage and its universal scale of values. Dejected though I was, facing imminent arrest and with it the end of all my literary plans, he would have none of it: "I can't understand what you are worrying about when you've already established yourself as second only to Tol-

1 Kornei Ivanovich Chukovsky (1882–1969) was a literary critic, translator, and celebrated writer of children's verse.

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stoy." He took me out to a raised wooden platform on a remote part of his land and put into my head the idea of concealing my secret manuscripts under it. He had read the stories of mine that had appeared in *Novy Mir*, but had never read anything else, despite his words about my being "second only to Tolstoy." He did not finish *Cancer Ward*, perhaps due to his squeamishness about illness, but what about *The First Circle*? Was this so that he would be able to deny any knowledge of my more extreme views? Or was it to avoid exposing himself to these alarming subversive rumblings? On one of the evenings I spent with him and his daughter, Lidia Korneyevna, I recited my *Prussian Nights* from memory, not knowing whether it would ever reach a wider audience or whether I would even succeed in preserving the manuscript.

Thus Lyusha and I became acquainted at the worst and most precarious of times for both of us, when we were both struggling to stay on an even keel—she had barely recovered her will to live, while I was holed up in my room like a wounded animal, not even bothering to switch on the light in the evenings as I could not muster the strength to read. One night I was summoned to supper by Kornei Chukovsky's cautious knock at my door, and emerging from my darkened room, I met the lively, attentive gaze of his granddaughter and instantly sensed that help was at hand. (Later she told me that she had been expecting to see a broken and dispirited man but in fact had been amazed at how unbowed I seemed; my breaking point was evidently set quite high. Later still, she recalled how our friendship had helped her to face life with new resolve and had so changed her outlook that she would never again experience that crisis of despair.)

With her frail constitution, poor appetite, and constant unflagging activity, the only thing that sustained Lyusha, even at the best of times, was her intensity of spirit, and this was all the more true in times of adversity. Though by no means a tiny, ethereal figure, she nevertheless appeared to defy the normal balance of physical forces, and this made her all the more reliant upon the driving force of her own spirit and upon a sense of conviction, if not a genuine conviction.

It was within the same time period (and in the same dining room in Chukovsky's house) that my differences with my first wife came to a head; she declared that she would rather see me arrested than hiding away and "deliberately choosing not to live with my family." From that instant I knew I could no longer depend on her. What was worse, I would have to keep up the arrangements that she was party to, while at the same time establishing a whole new secret system that would have to be kept hidden from her as from a hostile outsider.

During those few short weeks, with the danger still threatening to strike, Lyusha was soon coming up with one helpful suggestion after another. First of all she offered me the use of the town apartment that she shared with her mother, Lidia Korneyevna—not just as a place where I could stay overnight and meet people but as a place to work (living in the provinces, I sorely missed having a pied-à-terre like this in Moscow); soon afterward, she offered her services as secretary, organizing my affairs, typing my work, meeting people on my behalf—whatever needed to be done. For me this was something new and unfamiliar—a real load off my shoulders. Help so sudden and on such a huge scale made it easier for me to keep my peace of mind during those grim months. Then, when I went off to my Hiding Place in Estonia, who was it but Lyusha who organized my departure, watching wide-eyed while I shaved off my beard in her kitchen, and who but her, of all my Moscow friends, should I entrust with Susi's address in Estonia in case of emergency?

In the spring of 1966, when I had just completed Part One of *Cancer Ward* out at Rozhdestvo, I was about to start typing it up myself as I always did. (In fact, this was a useful way of making a third or fourth revi-

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sion of the text.) But Lyusha was so persistent in offering to do the typing for me that I was sorely tempted. It seemed unthinkable not to do it myself, yet, hard-pressed as I was, the gift of two whole weeks—so much time, so much breathing space!—was almost irresistible. Despite my misgivings, I agreed. Back I went to Rozhdestvo that May—and it was like a birthday present, two weeks out of the blue! Lyusha went about her task with amazing speed and dedication, and it never so much as occurred to me that this was her first experience of typing on such a scale. (Another area where she was short of experience was proofreading. For tactical reasons there was not a moment to lose in getting the text into samizdat distribution, so all seven copies were snatched from her high-impact typewriter the moment they were finished, and sped on their way.)

That was when I learned just how quickly books could be launched into samizdat—a lot faster than you can get them written! While Lyusha was tapping away at the first part, I was quickly writing the second; the work went like wildfire. The Chukovskys' position at the very hub of Moscow literary life greatly eased the problem of distribution (we did not know, nor could anyone know, whether something as big as a whole novel would take off in samizdat), and the entire task of distributing the copies, getting them to the next typist, retrieving them when the agreed time was up and remembering who still had what—this, too, Lyusha took upon herself. She did so much to relieve the pressure on me that my strength and my time were virtually doubled, and in the course of that summer, writing at full speed, I was able to finish the second part of *Cancer Ward*—and there was Lyusha already tapping out the final version before it, too, set off to brave the fields of samizdat.

After the debacle of 1965, it was Lyusha who helped me transform the whole pace of my life and go irrevocably on the attack. I thought of her as my closest collaborator in all my practical plans and actions; we would go over everything carefully together (turning increasingly to the seclusion of nature as the threat of bugged apartments grew). Lyusha was in on the secret of *Gulag* from the first and knew all the details of its development. That was when she first started gathering information and making inquiries; she spent a lot of time on the scheme to map all the camps in the Gulag system. (Two qualified geographers, Nina Pakhtusova and Natalya Kind, were working on it; indeed, they had finished much of it and had even photocopied their map, but it turned out too amateurish, with too many areas left incomplete, and I decided against using it.) I had barely finished drafting Part One of the *Gulag* and begun to type some of it up before Lyusha was already hard at work making the final copy. By now the KGB had a pretty good idea that she was helping me, and the Moscow apartment began to look increasingly dangerous, since it was often left unattended when Lidia Korneyevna was out at Peredelkino and Lyusha was at work. So Lyusha avoided doing the typing in small batches; instead, knowing in advance when there would be an upsurge of work, she would save up the vacation that was due to her and take it all at once when a period of intensive work was called for. Spring of 1968 was a case in point: typing away in Moscow all April she managed to finish the entire first volume of *Gulag*. Then at Easter Q arrived and we all met up at Rozhdestvo, whereupon Lyusha went at it and had the whole of the second volume typed up by the end of May. (Q was so impressed with her speed that she dubbed her "the Paganini of the typewriter.") With the third volume, Lyusha helped not just Q but my wife, too, even though there was not much love lost between the two of them. Lyusha just gritted her teeth, plunged into the work, not setting foot outside her damp room for a month, and kept the pressure on. Lyusha was the only one of the three who knew the route, the courier, and the destination of the microfilmed copy of *Gulag*, and she alone was involved in every twist and turn of that

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eventful Pentecost when we smuggled it abroad. I remember her coming out to Rozhdestvo from Peredelkino one dull and windswept day to pick up the capsule of film and take it to Eva. I don't know whether it was the malevolent driving wind that gave me such gloomy premonitions at the time. But then, two days later, on the eve of Pentecost Sunday itself, Lyusha suddenly turned up back at Rozhdestvo to tell me that there had been a snag with the handoff and that the "youngster," Sasha Andreyev, had been tailed. It seemed that all our presentiments were coming true! If I look at it quite soberly, she ought not to have come out to fetch me: Sasha was not due to fly back until Sunday, and the capsule was to follow on Monday; I could have stayed at Rozhdestvo for another forty-eight hours without any risk. But Lyusha came hurtling to the rescue, bent on getting me out of harm's way. Once I heard about the surveillance, my little plot of land at the forest's edge amid the waving crowns of the birch trees could no longer hold any joy for me. Her sense of imminent danger communicated itself to me, and I gave in and made up my mind to disappear from Rozhdestvo, spending these critical days in a place where I could not be followed; if everything went wrong, perhaps I would head back to my Hiding Place to spend a few more months at liberty and at least get something done. Half an hour's notice to leave the ordered world of my beloved little dacha and drop out of sight! I told my wife not to come and see me in my temporary refuge, in case she should be tailed. On the way to catch the train I explained to Lyusha where I would be staying, and we parted at the station, leaving her relieved that I had made a clean getaway. But then I spent three days locked away in utter misery. Lyusha was supposed to come and tell me if there was any news at all, but she did not come; she was languishing at home, waiting in vain for word to get through. It was not until the evening of the second day, when I was already asleep, that she burst in, bearing preliminary glad tidings: at least the "youngster" had been allowed to leave the Soviet Union without being detained. But we had to wait till the fourth day to learn of the happy outcome—the capsule had arrived without incident, and everyone and everything had got away safely!

With that threat lifted, I immediately got down to the final revision of the ninety-six-chapter *First Circle*. For her part, Lyusha, who had already used up her "vacation" typing *Gulag*, was back at the institute trying to catch up not just with her work but with her chores for Granddad too; Kornei Chukovsky had long since noticed that she was not the assistant she had once been, and he was understandably jealous that so much of her energy was being diverted away from him. It was autumn when Lyusha picked up *First Circle* from me—and finished the whole text in one great spurt of typing. And that winter, during one of our forest walks at Peredelkino, she put her plan to me: in order to save our "American friends" (that was how we thought of the Carlisles at the time)[2] from having to redo the translation and hunt out the variants between the original and revised version of *First Circle*, she would retype the entire novel specially for them, highlighting all the changes. Then all they had to do was translate the new passages (we called this our "cosmetic" edition). It was a grueling, painstaking task, yet Lyusha managed it in a few months that winter, dashing home from the institute each evening to get back to it. (In the summer of 1975, when she was burning all the papers my wife, Alya, and I had left behind, this typescript went into the flames unused. Years and years of work would vanish without a trace this way.)

There was no limit to Lyusha's appetite

2 Henry and Olga Carlisle were entrusted with overseeing the English-language translation of *The Gulag Archipelago*. On the Carlisles' dispute with Solzhenitsyn over the translation of *Gulag*, see *The Oak and the Calf*, translated by Harry Willetts (Harper & Row, 1980), page 320.

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for work and the amount she could get done. In the course of the three years of our acquaintanceship, she typed up no less than five hefty books of mine. (And don't forget that in the Soviet Union, finding all those reams of uniform, high-quality paper was no laughing matter; sometimes you could not buy it for love or money. Then there was all the carbon paper as well.) And apart from working directly on these and other ventures, she was party to all my tactical moves and precautionary measures.

In 1966 I made my first explicit ventures into the public arena, beginning with readings, then my letter to the Congress of the Writers' Union, then the feud with the union's secretariat. Not one of those steps ever enjoyed Lyusha's direct support. Never did I hear her say, "Yes! Now's the time to strike!" Rather, she would shake her head in anxious disapproval or even try to talk me out of it, as she did with my statement about Zhores Medvedev. I always felt uncomfortable and unhappy about this: my immediate plans were known to only a handful of people, so the advice of any one of them was bound to carry great weight. And I was so tied up with my work and the fight I was waging that it only gradually dawned on me that Lyusha's focus was not on the issues as a whole, not on the strategy or principles involved. She was just afraid each time that something would happen to me, that the claws would snap shut on my latest sortie. Yet even though she disapproved of my letter to the Writers' Union, she helped type out more than a hundred copies of it, and it was the same with all the "open letters" and "declarations" that followed. Fifty copies of the lengthy "Record" of my meeting with the Writers' Union secretariat went out thanks solely to her. I could rest assured that she would make the right number of copies and have them ready to launch at what we calculated to be the moment of maximum impact. Then she would deliver them to our principal springboards (to Nadya Levitskaya at the Library of Foreign Literature and Anna Berzer at *Novy Mir*, to various apartments in the Aeroport district of Moscow and out to Peredelkino to an intermediary who would ferry them to Leningrad). After that they would circulate automatically.

About this time Lyusha got to know others who were helping me, and she naturally assumed responsibility for our frequent meetings, communications, and related business. Her apartment quickly became the focal point for my connections with Leningrad—that is, with Q; the Etkinds; the "First *Infantes*," a group of young people who emerged in Leningrad at that time and wanted to help me (I got as far as planning to use them to make copies of *Gulag*, but our collaboration came to nothing); and the "Second *Infantes*" (the Kuklins). All my "unofficial" communications bound for Leningrad would be kept at Lyusha's apartment and picked up by couriers traveling that way, while everything that came in from Leningrad would go to her, too, and visitors from there would stop by. (Lidia Korneyevna was a Leningrader by birth, and Lyusha, too, had been born there, so their links with the city were still active.) Before long there were several trusted acquaintances who knew the addresses of our Leningrad contacts and would take things directly to them. In addition, there were people from the provinces whom I had no wish to rebuff but whom circumstances prevented me from meeting in person; they would be given Lyusha's address, and she would provide the books they needed, pass on letters, and hold talks with them on my behalf. Since she was in the heart of Moscow and I was only there on the occasional flying visit, it made life much simpler to put my contacts with certain specific groups of my acquaintances entirely in her hands. This applied to Tenno's widow, for instance, and various visiting Estonians, as well as to the Kobozev and Teush families. At one point I even gave the Zubovs her address to use when they wrote to me. And then there were the monthly parcels to be sent to my Aunt Irina, another task that was entrusted to her,

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to say nothing of all kinds of meetings with my Aeroport contacts; they were literary people so Lyusha was, of course, in her element. In their scores they passed through Lyusha's hands—too many, indeed, to list in these pages, even if I could confidently call them all to mind.

The arrival of a Dictaphone opened up new possibilities for Lyusha's work: she could take the lists of questions I had prepared and interview various eyewitnesses about the events of the revolution (a sister-in-law of Palchinsky, a nephew of Guchkov, the engineer K. M. Polivanov, and so on), then type up their recorded answers so that they reached me on neatly organized sheets. As my representative, Lyusha found herself at the center of a very considerable circle of contacts. The amount of time and effort she saved me by acting in this way I could not even begin to estimate. In all that she did for me she was never once the cause of delay; everything ran more smoothly in her hands, and this gave me far greater freedom of movement. How can I measure the energy she expended? Such concentrated effort exceeded the powers of a single person and could only be achieved thanks to her unfailingly buoyant spirit.

In the autumn of 1969 Kornei Ivanovich lay close to death, and love and duty combined to keep his favorite granddaughter at his bedside. (Besides, the fate of his unpublished writings and any hopes for their posthumous publication rested squarely on her shoulders.) And then, suddenly, danger threatened from afar: in Rostov-on-Don a complete set of the full text of *Gulag* was somehow left dangling in the hands of people we did not know. And Lyusha tore herself away from her grandfather and went racing off to Rostov to try and save it. (Coming back on the train, she put the bag containing it into the luggage space under the lower berth—safer that way! This meant that two old ladies had to make do with the upper bunks, try as they might to persuade her to give up the lower one. But how could you leave a bombshell like this lying around unattended? So she had to make up a story about recovering from an operation.)

Inevitably, the efforts that stick in one's mind are those that yielded tangible results. But what of the countless efforts that proved fruitless, what of all those abortive dry runs? It was Mstislav Rostropovich who sent us up one such dead end. When our paths crossed, it was a long time before he could appreciate just how dangerous and delicate things were. In autumn 1968, on his way back from Western Europe, he wondered what to give me for my fiftieth birthday. And what should he buy and gaily set off with (indeed, he actually got it through customs, since they did not check him at that time)? A *whirly-printer*! We did not know its proper name, but in fact this was a duplicating machine that could turn out multiple copies from a single typed stencil. Rostropovich thought he was opening up marvelous new possibilities for me to publish my own things inside the Soviet Union! And indeed, Lyusha and I really got involved with this new toy: we experimented with it, planned how we might use it to run off one or two hundred copies of *Gulag*. (The idea at the time was that we would publish it all within Russia by ourselves.) We stocked up on paper, ordered other things we needed from Rostropovich, who brought them back from the West with him. But eventually we realized that there was no way we could cope with a task like this. And then we were at a loss about what to do with this whirly-thing of ours and had to think of someone we could give it to for printing leaflets.

Lyusha took the initiative in making good the opportunities I missed, arranging meetings, contacts, consultations, and sources of assistance. She was so absorbed in my work and the public response to it that in 1968 she thought up, compiled, and published in samizdat a collection of essays and public statements entitled *The Word Can Smash Concrete*. And all this she did single-handed.

Shifting more and more of the organi-

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zation onto Lyusha purely for reasons of convenience, I also handed over to her the task of meeting and talking with Y. A. Stefanov, an expert on the Don region and the tsarist army. This was a man so alien to her and the circles in which she moved that their paths would never otherwise have crossed, and they would never have had a chance to talk. In the thick of the fray, organizational considerations dictated our actions, and I tended to forget Lyusha had sprung from quite different soil and was not to be uprooted from it. On the face of it, the Don was a theme altogether remote from Lyusha's background and interests, but it began to impinge on our lives from various directions and in various ways. Now it took the form of Kryukov's posthumous papers, now of I. N. Tomashevskaya's study of Sholokhov. Or it suddenly turned up in the person of an artist from the Don region who wanted to present me (through Lyusha's agency, as ever) with copies of *Donskaya volna*, the magazine Kryukov had published in Novocherkassk between 1918 and 1919. And once we were brought maps of the Don region, so detailed that they showed every farmstead, and Lyusha was the one who organized the copying. Then there were the Don Cossack materials provided by S. Starikov, which had to be processed as a matter of urgency—and yet again, who should come to the rescue but Lyusha?

So selfless, effective, and indispensable was Lyusha that at the beginning of 1968, when my thoughts were turning more and more often to the prospect of my sudden demise and I was wondering how to ensure that my work would carry on after I was gone and my writings survive into the future, I began to weigh whether I should make Lyusha my literary executor, and we both asked lawyers we knew what steps we could take, even under Soviet conditions and given the official hostility toward me. This turned out to be far from simple and dragged on for some time; under Soviet law the state could "compulsorily purchase" (that is, confiscate) the copyright of a deceased citizen.

And not once in those first four years of working together did we clarify the basic questions (who needs clarification when things are going well?), such as how she understood my work as a whole, whether she saw it as I did, and exactly why she was doing all this. I saw things my way and she hers, yet our work together went smoothly, harmoniously, without a hitch. In those years we were under such inhuman pressure from all sides that we never had a chance to talk about anything but the matter at hand. Once, though—I don't know what prompted it—I asked her outright and with belatedly dawning amazement, You must surely be doing all this for the *cause*? For that great Goal (which, incidentally, neither of us had ever named)? She answered with a frank "no." She was just doing it for me, to help me—although she was, it is true, much taken with the idea that books can plow furrows in the minds of men.

And for years Lyusha was content with such justifications, for they allowed her to turn a blind eye to my long-term aims. But for me this was a disheartening revelation.

It is simply a fact that an understanding of the large picture never comes easily to us. Swept up as we are in an unceasing flow of events, we are inevitably slow to grasp their overall significance. Thus, not only Lyusha but I, too, for a long time failed to see the true nature of my position in society. After five years of Khrushchev's shilly-shallying in the shadow of Stalin's mausoleum, an irrepressible cry of impatience was forming in the land: there was a limit to marking time. To paraphrase Pushkin, the country was waiting for anyone at all. That is when my *Ivan Denisovich* made its appearance, at first in samizdat form. But this was decidedly not what the educated part of society had hungered for; they had yearned for a different protagonist and a different realm of experience. (I think, incidentally, that this explains why a samizdat copy of *Ivan Denisovich* did not immediately find its way abroad, as Tvardovsky had feared would happen in 1962. The work was too peasant-oriented, too Russian, and hence, as it were,

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encoded. If Western correspondents did read the samizdat version at the time, they probably judged it to have limited appeal to Western tastes.) Indeed, before the publication in *Novy Mir*, there was some instinctive hesitation among the cultural elite as they wondered whether there might be a certain "anti-intelligentsia" bias in my work. It seemed the better part of wisdom not to overdo the praises of *Ivan Denisovich*. But the forces released could not be contained, and it was precisely the intelligentsia in the widest sense of the word that did the most for the dissemination and recognition of my peasant tale. None of us could foresee the future, and we all lacked understanding. Thus I recall wondering for years why it was that writers are supposed to have enemies and envious detractors, whereas I had *not a single one*. (Needless to say, I was wrong, but I was in too much of a rush to notice.) The desire to lambaste the powers-that-be was so universal that I received unanimous support from every unofficial quarter, even from individuals or groups whose orientation I could not share. For several years I rode the crest of this wave, with no one but the KGB persecuting me while I enjoyed the solid backing of society as a whole. (This type of thing had happened a number of times in tsarist Russia, too—for instance, when Tolstoy was championed by people who had no sympathy for his teaching but who supported him solely to express their opposition to the state.) Throughout this time I simply did not realize that the support I received from "progressive society" was but a passing phase based on a misunderstanding. And neither I nor my closest associate, Lyusha, had any grounds at first for exploring the dissimilarities that existed between her view of the world and mine. At the time, things were undifferentiated to such a degree that even my "Prose Miniatures" were warmly greeted by the cultural elite. Russian Orthodoxy might have been looked down upon by them, but it had become fashionable to acknowledge the aesthetic worth of icons and even to recognize the lyrical beauty of a church in a landscape.

The first question that revealed a glimpse of the gap between Lyusha and myself concerned the Vlasov movement, an issue that came to the fore when Lyusha read my play *Prisoners*. The work was alarmingly alien to her. Deeply upset, she tried in vain to find an explanation, ultimately falling back on a makeshift formula to the effect that she "could not accept certain parts of the text."

Lyusha's reaction really had to be expected. For without lengthy and patient elucidation, how could one possibly communicate the nation's experience at the front and in prison to a person like Lyusha, who had been a teenage Muscovite in the wartime Soviet Union? Beyond that, her reaction also reflected the essential split in public attitudes toward Vlasov: the cultural elite judged it quite unforgivable that during the war with Hitler the Vlasovites could have spared a thought for anything else that lay ahead—the future of Russia, for instance. (The Vlasov theme was even more jarring to Lyusha in *Gulag*, a work for which she was literally risking her life. She loved this book, helping to draw it forward, to carry its burden, and to bring it to completion, all the while without fully approving of its explosive potential.)

Although the cultural milieu to which the Chukovskys belonged had long since lost all sympathy for the Soviet regime in its present form, they were nevertheless psychologically wedded to the nonreligious traditions of the Russian nineteenth-century liberation movement with its special brand of populism. (Thus, Lyusha's mother, Lidia Korneyevna, virtually idolized Alexander Herzen.) For this reason the Chukovskys were incapable of connecting their repudiation of the present state of affairs with what had been the decisive product of the liberation movement—the events of 1917 leading up to October. What's more, the very way of life in the Moscow of the 1920s and 1930s was such that educated society was quite sincerely unaware of the suffering visited upon the Russian national spirit. At one point—this was in the context of the collection *From Under the Rubble*—Lidia Korne-

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yevna voiced perplexity as to when slights to the Russian national consciousness could have occurred or become acute. She simply had not noticed. Educated society had a clear awareness only of slights directed against the Jews and to a lesser degree of those directed against some other nationalities.

In any case, Lyusha and I were always so caught up in the whirlwind of our conspiratorial enterprise that I had little chance to make detailed inquiries about her view of my writings. I didn't always have the time even to savor the charmingly apt sense of humor she displayed in some of the lighter moments. And her unfailingly noble dignity and tact were blessings I took very much for granted. Meanwhile Lyusha was probably trying to account for my remoteness in purely human terms, settling on the explanation offered by many others: that I was overwhelmed by the double burdens of work and struggle and that this had caused ordinary human feelings and attentive kindness toward others to atrophy in me.

But of course no loss of feeling was involved here—only the relentless press of duty, as well as the desperate shortness of time. I could not have carried my burden to the end if I had acted otherwise. What is more, the full picture was never clear to persons close to me, for beyond the immediate struggle with the Communist state loomed a greater challenge still: the Russian spirit lay comatose, as if crushed beneath a mighty rock, and this vast tombstone—even less visible at the time than any of my invisible allies—must somehow be raised, overturned, and sent crashing downhill.

Lyusha was still hopeful when she picked up a bundle of hand-written notebooks containing my *August 1914*. She was always fond of these moments and of her role as the first person to convert my text into typewritten form. But what was this? Chapter after chapter simply dismayed her: "The purpose of writing all this is utterly beyond me." (This was a judgment I heard from many members of the same cultural milieu, including even E. Zvorykina. What was the point of stirring up the past, the events of 1914, the tsarist era? Who needs all that?) But when it came to surveying the selected responses of "test readers," Lyusha carried out the whole operation with dispatch. The texts needed to be distributed, collected, and passed along to others, in each case rapidly and secretly. The delight of many of these readers served to reconcile Lyusha somewhat with *August*, and one of the results of this process, carried through with her characteristic energy, was a collection of samizdat essays on *August 1914*. This compilation seems to have been intended in part as a polemical response to me, the thought being that the bulk of the essays would confirm Lyusha's view of my book.

But when I asked her to type up my "Lenten Letter to Patriarch Pimen" in February 1972, she flatly refused—for the first time in the course of our long collaboration—and at that moment became true to herself by shaking off the spell. After more than six years of working together, it became apparent that we did not think alike.

What did this mean? What was it specifically that had caused Lyusha to protest so vehemently? In what way had my open letter given such offense to educated society? It could hardly have been the accusatory tone, since my readers had gotten used to that. And surely it was not a question of resenting criticism directed at the high office of Patriarch. What rankled, I suspect, was the fact that my "Lenten Letter" did not address some abstract spiritual issues but had called upon Russian Orthodoxy—with all its traditions and rituals—to begin participating in the real world. That was going much too far: enlightened society simply could not accept Orthodoxy in such doses. It was clearly *August 1914* and my "Lenten Letter" that destroyed the wholehearted support of society that I had so unreservedly enjoyed until then. After the appearance of these texts, only a small minority remained on my side; this faction will grow only with the slow development of new generations and social strata.

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Lyusha was tormented by split loyalties. She could not escape the influence of the milieu that had shaped her entire life, but she also cherished the forward movement of our common task and felt certain of its significance and value. And in the final analysis it was not a question of philosophical opinion: Lyusha was the kind of dedicated and psychologically whole individual who had no need to light every step of her way with an ideological lantern. After her "revolt" over my open letter to the Patriarch, she resumed lending a hand in every way she could. But it is also true that the areas in which we worked together had begun to shrink some years earlier, with several new projects (such as the planning for the collection *From Under the Rubble*) coordinated outside her immediate circle. Nor did I return to the unfinished business of making her my formal literary executor.

Meanwhile my work on *October 1916* kept raising a multitude of questions that could not have been foreseen when I wrote *August 1914*. It was only now that it became clear to me that besides researching World War I, I also needed to take a close look at early twentieth-century Russian social currents, at a large number of public figures ranging from monarchists to Mensheviks, at the Russian governmental structure at the time, at the workers' movement, and even at the list of factories in St. Petersburg, with the exact location of each marked on a map of the city. Many of the queries relating to these issues, as well as numerous other tasks, such as the transmission of messages, now fell on Lyusha's shoulders. Sometimes I put her in touch with those who could supply specific information, such as Professor P. A. Zaionchkovsky, but usually it was Lyusha herself who sought out informants or consultants appropriate to my inquiries. (I didn't even learn the names of these individuals and don't know whom to thank.) Lidia Korneyevna's right to take out books from the Lenin Library—she was still a member of the Writers' Union at the time—was also pressed into service here, and a steady supply of books, all clearly intended for my use, now flowed from the library to the politically tainted wing of Rostropovich's house in Zhukovka under the very nose of the KGB. Indeed, we made no secret of it and discussed it openly on the telephone.

Lyusha's prominent role in my struggle finally became too much for the KGB to bear, and the flames of danger flared up at her feet. Toward the end of 1972 she was attacked by an "unknown" assailant in the lobby of her apartment building. The man knocked her to the concrete floor and began choking her. (A doorman-cum-informer normally sat there, but he was suspiciously absent at that time.) Lyusha was so startled that she did not cry out, but she managed to fight free and the attacker fled. Friends thought that this could have been some genuinely sick individual; the courtyard, however, was under constant surveillance, and the KGB had an office a mere twenty yards off. All of the Chukovskys' dissident acquaintances were as well known to the security people as Lyusha was, having been observed many times. The militia seems to have made a halfhearted attempt to investigate the incident, but nothing came of it.

Then, on June 20, 1973, just when my family was being bombarded with anonymous threats through the mail, a truck traveling beside the taxi in which Lyusha was riding on a major Moscow street suddenly made an inexplicable ninety-degree turn out of its lane and crashed into the right side of the vehicle Lyusha was sitting in. The force of the collision should have killed her; Lyusha's survival, after lengthy medical treatment, was thus unexpected. Once again there was no direct proof that it had been a deliberate assassination attempt. (And who can ever gather such proof against the KGB in the land of the Soviets?) But in the multiple-lane traffic of Sadovoye Ring Road, where the crash happened, not even a lunatic would dare make such a turn, a maneuver for which a driver would earn a prison term even if no accident were involved. Lyusha attended the trial with the

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naïve purpose of defending the driver so that he would not be jailed (he had two children), but the court was quick to set this suspicious motorized bandit free in any case on the grounds that he was a member of a "special" military unit.

In the weeks that followed, the attacks on me continued, Voronyanskaya was arrested, and a typescript of *Gulag* was seized. In this context, the crash seems a calculated blow planned by the KGB.

When Lyusha was riding in that taxi, she had with her some things that had to be kept out of the hands of the security people, as well as the keys to her apartment where many other items were stored. From the scene of the accident she was removed to the Sklifosovsky Clinic, where all her things were taken from her in accordance with hospital regulations. Badly injured though she was, Lyusha still had the presence of mind to call Natalya Stolyarova, who lived nearby. Stolyarova rushed over to take possession of Lyusha's belongings and, with the assertiveness of a camp veteran, overcame the hospital's resistance and saved everything.

Though conclusive evidence is lacking, I am virtually certain that the blow that fell on Lyusha was delivered on my account.

Nor was this the first serious traffic accident in which Lyusha had been involved. Several years earlier she had crashed on her motorcycle and had vowed never to drive again. This time she suffered a major concussion with lingering aftereffects. For some time she could not even walk by herself. She needed bed rest and could neither read nor think properly. Medicines were urgently brought in from abroad; fortunately, this was something that we could do at the time. Lyusha, meanwhile, did not always seem aware of her actions, of the way she became excited, could not stop talking, and jumped from topic to topic. In August she returned from a period of convalescence on the Baltic Sea, and in a forest clearing near Peredelkino I told her about my plan of attack: a major interview with Western correspondents. In the past she had always made impassioned attempts to dissuade me from such actions, but this time she listened with what seemed like befogged indifference—another symptom of her injuries that manifested itself at times. I asked her whether I could mention the attempt on her life in the interview, but she forbade it.

But the battle that had now been joined did not seem to require Lyusha's participation. Sitting there in the tranquility of a forest clearing, I thought that she would now have the chance to recover peacefully, quite free of any tasks on my behalf. But in fact an "encounter battle" was shaping up, with Q going through her torments at KGB headquarters in Leningrad, though this was still unknown to us. Two weeks later the news of Voronyanskaya's death and the seizure of *Gulag* hit Lyusha like the stroke of a lash, setting back her recovery and almost blocking it for good. On two consecutive days she traveled to Firsanovka to bring me the news that first the "archive" [arkhiv] and then Arkhip had been seized. She regressed to the confused and agitated state she had been in after the accident, while the situation demanded calm deliberation, with numerous matters hanging in the balance along with various caches of texts that had been stored by or through her. Lamara held a particularly significant collection, but every move to warn her posed deadly risks, while not warning her was also out of the question. Lyusha, her mind clouded by her injuries now needed to solve increasingly complex problems, with the dark mystery of Q's death tormenting her like a beak hammering on her vulnerable head. She tried to put together the contradictory pieces of evidence, quite plausibly expecting to share Q's fate, and in this state of extreme stress she really needed to meet with me for several hours a day in order to talk things over. It was a genuine need, and I had an obligation to her, yet precisely because of the extreme danger, this was a period when I could not spare a minute for meetings and conversation as I scrambled to take countermeasures and to

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salvage manuscripts. The only joint action that Lyusha and I undertook at the time was to send Alyosha Shipovalnikov to meet with Samutin in Leningrad—a false move. For years Lyusha had helped maintain that relentless momentum without which we could never hope to succeed. But now, during the weeks of her convalescence, it worked to her disadvantage. What she required at this time were extensive sympathy, help in everyday affairs, and words of encouragement. With all this in short supply, Lyusha was overcome by a feeling of abandonment, abandonment in a hostile world.

However, no further blow fell on our circle, precisely because the furious counterattack had proved to be the best defense of all. The caches of texts were safe. With time, Lyusha's recovery resumed, permitting her to worry about Irina Tomashevskaya, who had fallen seriously ill in the Crimea. October brought the news of Tomashevskaya's sudden death. This was another blow to a mind not yet fully recovered, and it brought a new round of urgent concerns.

That autumn I had left Firsanovka for the season, had not lived in Rostropovich's house since spring, and was barred by the militia from settling in Moscow with my family. In November Lidia Korneyevna once again invited me to spend the winter in the Chukovsky home in Peredelkino. This did not lead to more frequent meetings with Lyusha, however. The pace of events was now brutally harsh as I tried to finish what I could—my preface to *Troubled Waters of the Quiet Don* and especially my essays for the collection *From Under the Rubble*. Though I understood fully that both Lidia Korneyevna and Lyusha would find these essays distasteful and difficult to accept, I nevertheless decided to let them sample these writings. Lidia Korneyevna read my "Letter to the Soviet Leaders" and, to my great surprise, voiced her approval. (Her ultimate test was always a comparison with Alexander Herzen, and he had addressed a letter to Tsar Alexander II.) She also read two of my essays for *From Under the Rubble*, finding them somewhat remote from her interests but nothing to get angry about. (She tends to take a broad view of things.)

With Lyusha it was a different story altogether. The "Letter to the Soviet Leaders" was the first text she had read without prior knowledge: it had been finished several months before and by now was already on its way to the leaders in question, as well as to the West. And on top of that came the three essays intended for *From Under the Rubble*. It was all too much, quite intolerable! She erupted like a volcano, with a particularly impassioned protest against Orthodoxy and patriotism. As she read the texts, Lyusha practically cursed. She tried to take notes, but her impatience got the better of her, and she decided to record her anger on a Dictaphone so as not to forget her most caustic comments, dropping all trace of the intellectual restraint and sobriety typical of her. She then used the recording to prepare written comments in which she denounced me in terms more bitter than anything that had ever been said between us. Although these written remarks were still rather disorderly, Lyusha rushed over to Peredelkino to spill them out to me herself. A certain degree of emotional substitution was involved here, no doubt, as can happen in arguments with women, where annoyance in one sphere is transferred to an entirely unrelated one. But there was also a pitiless revelation of a misgiving with which she could hardly come to terms: could she have sacrificed so many years and her best efforts in the service of this? Would it not have been infinitely more appropriate and more loyal to have helped her grandfather in the last years of his life? And now to help her mother, who was going blind and whose work had become a constant struggle?

I walked into the dining area from the same room I had occupied eight years earlier. Then I had come out into the softly illuminated room in order to meet Lyusha for the first time; now I stepped out into

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the dim January light for a painful confrontation. Looking pale and drawn, not yet fully recovered—one had to wonder what was keeping body and soul together—Lyusha launched into a passionate tirade against my unspeakably shameful Orthodox-cum-patriotic orientation in *From Under the Rubble*. And, she added, now she understood that it was not for nothing that she had some Jewish blood in her veins.

My defense was halfhearted at best. This was not the time for persuasion—that should have been started long ago, and in any case arguments are not much use against emotions. On top of it all, this was taking place in January 1974, a less-than-propitious moment for quarrels. All of Lyusha's strength had gone into her monologue—afterward, she needed to lie down and catch her breath. For my part, I was grieved by the realization that all too much had been neglected over the years and that it was now far too late to set it straight.

But even in the course of these months and after this conversation, Lyusha asked for work. She no longer had control over the course of events, yet she asked for work and wanted to help! At the time I did not happen to have that much to suggest, and I asked her to work on a chronological "mesh" of the February Revolution, focusing on particular fragments among the mass of revolutionary events as well as on background information about specific individuals. And work she did, to her everlasting credit! Her stance toward the regime was also irreproachable both before and after my expulsion from the country. My own view of the world was emerging more clearly and, alien though it must have seemed to her, she gave it full support. Disregarding her own background, her upbringing and outlook on life, she bent her back to the task I had set myself and forged ever onward.

During this period Lidia Korneyevna was also expelled from the Writers' Union. (In response she let loose a fine broadside against the literary bureaucrats.)

Soon thereafter I was deported, and Lyusha now became a frequent visitor to our besieged and disrupted Moscow apartment, where my wife, Alya, had her hands full with the task of coordinating the evacuation of my effects. Lyusha would come by every evening after work and sit at my writing table, sorting drafts and preparatory materials, many of which she knew or had even typed. She helped put together my papers for shipment to the West, even though it was not yet certain that Alya would succeed in bringing this off.

The first months after my expulsion were a difficult time for the Chukovskys. Both mother and daughter were bombarded with anonymous letters, some in verse, some filled with obscenities, some informing them that "the lion has been killed" or "will be killed." Among the visitors to their Peredelkino dacha—it was open to all in the manner of a museum—there were now spies and insolent agents provocateurs. The informer-doorman in the lobby of their Moscow apartment building would now stop their guests on the grounds that they had not greeted him politely enough (one visitor thus treated was seventy-five years old). Lidia Korneyevna's near blindness made it possible for her to write only with black marker pens brought in from abroad, but these would be deliberately mangled at customs or else filled with useless pink fluid. These were some of the ways in which the state played its untraceable dirty tricks, many of them so petty that it seemed almost embarrassing to make a public fuss about them and hardly worth the trouble.

On the eve of my first birthday in exile, Lyusha, in an act of defiance against the powers-that-be, sent a congratulatory telegram to Zurich—a message of admiration addressed to Public Enemy Number One. This proved to be more than the security people could swallow. Early the next morning her phone rang, and the following characteristic dialogue ensued.

"Elena Tsezarevna, this is so-and-so from the KGB. I hope that does not frighten you."

"No, why should it?"

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True enough, it was no longer the 1930s, and the name of the agency did not make one's blood run cold; the KGB had even been mocked.

"I'm happy to hear that. I take it, then, that you could come by to see us sometime after lunch."

"Sorry, I can't make it."

"When would be a convenient time for you?"

"To tell the truth, it would be inconvenient to come to see you at any time."

"In that case we'll come and see you."

"That would be highly undesirable."

"So what do you suggest?"

"Send me a summons."

"You mean to say that you admit your guilt and want us to begin formal *proceedings* against you?"

Thrust and parry have their limits. . . .

"No, I didn't mean that, but isn't that the accepted procedure?"

"Look, I'm trying to be polite with you as you're a woman."

"Do you mean to say that you're not polite with men?"

The voice at the other end grew sterner. "I am calling to request that you come here."

By now Lyusha was angry, and she, too, was getting worked up. "I am not an ambulance, and I don't rush out in response to telephone calls."

"When will you be at work?"

"I have no intention of informing you."

"Then we'll pick you up on the street."

"I'll scream for help."

"But you don't always scream, do you?" (An allusion to the incident in the lobby of her apartment house some time ago. A confirmation from the horse's mouth that *they* were responsible.)

"But this time I most certainly will scream."

"There's really no need to talk this way. After all *we're with you all the time*."

"I see. You're just like the good Lord, I suppose."

"No, the good Lord is with your friend."

"What friend? I have many friends."

"The one you address with a capital F." (Had they intercepted a letter sent via private channels?) "In any case we would very much like to have an unofficial talk with you."

By now Lyusha had lost all patience. "Get it into your heads that I shall have no unofficial talks with you whatever, only official ones!"

And she slammed down the receiver.

They never did come, and she was not touched.

With these people one has to exhibit an uncompromising firmness of spirit—this was a point Lyusha had assimilated in the course of our common struggle. But it could not have been an easy lesson to absorb for a single woman confronting a well-fed system smugly conscious of its long arms and many heads.

There followed a long series of crank calls: "Expect the Bedouins to arrive today." "The camels have set off."

All of this seemed straight out of the satirical novels of Ilf and Petrov, but then again, could one always shrug off such things lightly?

After several quiet months Lyusha rejoiced to think that the hounds had been called off. But at that very point there was a break-in at her apartment, and the place was ransacked.

The KGB also took revenge on Kornei Chukovsky's books. His *Chukokkala*, any new editions of his children's books, and even studies about him were all blocked by the vengeful agency.

Although the most dangerous period is now behind her—since Lyusha is no longer closely linked to affairs that were deemed unlawful—it is of course impossible to predict what the future may bring. Not long ago she could not refrain from defending me at a meeting in her institute. And some recently interrogated individuals report that she was referred to as the "head of Solzhenitsyn's counterintelligence service."

In case of arrest, Lyusha plans to follow a very simple course of action: she won't deny

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anything or entangle herself in complicated statements but will simply admit that she gave help to Russian literature and make it clear that she has no intention of saying anything else.

For a number of years after my expulsion, Lyusha helped to support an old aunt of mine in Georgievsk. And she wrote to me in Zurich using unofficial channels, supplying me with many important materials.

My meeting with Lyusha in that far-off autumn helped her emerge from a state of dejection. It led to her participation in a furious struggle. But that struggle consumed years of her life, took possession of her soul, and dragged her—at least in part against her will—into a tragic and uncharted orbit.*

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* With the advent of Gorbachev's *glasnost*, Lyusha was the first to raise her voice in the press (in *Knizhnoe obozrenie*) about me and about the need to permit my return to Russia, though in the process she tended to present me in terms of Soviet virtues. The journal received a mass of positive responses, as well as some letters expressing indignation. The readers probably thought Lyusha's statement had been a disinterested appeal: none of them knew how much energy, time, and heart she had given to this author.—*Solzhenitsyn's note, 1990*

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Calamities of art

by Roger Kimball

The frenzied passion for art is a cancer that eats up everything else; and, as the out-and-out absence of what is proper and true in art is tantamount to the absence of art, the man fades away completely; excessive specialization of a faculty ends in nothing. . . . The folly of art is on a par with the abuse of the mind. The creation of one or the other of these two supremacies begets stupidity, hardness of heart, and unbounded pride and egotism.
—Baudelaire, *L'Art romantique*

There are indeed many things that are classified as "backward" that might be the starting-point of real inner progress.
—Hans Sedlmayr, *Art in Crisis*

Among the many peculiarities affecting our cultural life today, perhaps none is more peculiar, or more fateful for the practice and enjoyment of art, than the fact that virtually anything can be put forward *and accepted* as a work of art. "Virtually" anything? An unnecessary caution, surely. Let your imagination run riot: whatever grotesquerie you conjure up—from the numbingly banal and commonplace to the repulsively pathological—rest assured that it has been eagerly proferred and just as eagerly embraced as art. And if by some fluke you named something that has not yet done duty as art—no matter: it is merely an oversight and will be corrected within a season or two.

Not that this situation is entirely new. Indeed, we have been living with the consequences of the vertiginous fact that anything can be art for many years: since the 1960s, certainly, and perhaps, in essentials, since the 'Teens, when the Dadaist crusader Marcel Duchamp unveiled his "Readymades" and impishly offered them to the public.

But there are some important differences between then and now. One difference is that Duchamp's pranks—as, for example, when he exhibited an ordinary bottle rack (the banal) or a urinal (the shocking, once upon a time) as works of art—were widely considered to be outrageous. Moreover, Duchamp *meant* them to be outrageous. We sometimes forget that the professed aim of Dada was not to extend but to explode the category "art." But something happened. "I threw the bottle rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge," Duchamp noted contemptuously some years later, "and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty." "They" were not the public—not yet—but taste-makers and suitably enfranchised members of that ever-growing congregation, "the art world."

Duchamp's own motives were, to put it mildly, mixed. But his exasperation is understandable. Looking back at the unfolding drama of avant-garde culture in this century, we see that the remarkable thing was not really the *phenomenon* of Dada—one of many late-Romantic expressions of nihilistic *Weltschmerz*—but rather its quick certification as a legitimate form of artistic

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expression. Who would have thought it possible? And yet Dada is now an academic and museological topic of impressive pedigree, the subject of exhibitions and monographs and doctoral dissertations.

An ominous precedent, that. Among other things, it demonstrates the extent to which the outrageous has become institutionalized: assimilated into the predictable cycle of museum exhibitions, curatorial safekeeping, and critical commentary. To be sure, a Robert Mapplethorpe or an Andres Serrano will now and again appear to inspire a frisson of anxiety and unhappiness. Yet, really, what is most striking about such figures is not how "controversial" they are —or were—but how quickly they are docketed and filed away as certifiable examples of contemporary art—even "great" contemporary art, if we are to believe the encomia of some noteworthy critics.

This situation—a situation in which any object or activity can be baptized as art—makes it difficult to get our bearings. Familiarity may not always breed contempt, exactly; but it does tend to inspire a certain complacency. We are tempted to overlook, to take for granted, what has become blatantly familiar, no matter how odd it is in itself. We may look and register the presence of something without really seeing or understanding it. It may be worth pausing, then, to remind ourselves just how much the meaning of the word "art" has mutated over the course of this century. Words like "freedom," "innovation," and "originality" have typically accompanied this process of mutation. It is clear that, for many, the expansion of art has been synonymous with some imperative promise of liberation: not only aesthetic liberation, but social, political, and even, it seems, what we might call metaphysical liberation.

Yet here as elsewhere in human affairs, there has generally been a gap between promise and fulfillment. From our vantage point in the 1990s, what might have looked like freedom may now seem like irresponsible license; what struck some as cleverly innovative may now appear merely idiosyncratic. Consider: is it not odd that, in many quarters, "art" has degenerated into a kind of honorific that is bestowed or withheld for reasons that have nothing to do with aesthetic quality or achievement? What does it mean—to take a few contemporary examples—that someone can package his own feces and distribute the result as works of art? Or that someone can have herself videotaped undergoing a series of disfiguring cosmetic surgeries and on that basis be hailed as a bona fide "performance artist"? Or that someone who is ill can successfully designate his hospital room a work of art? Such examples can be multiplied indefinitely, as anyone who has visited a gallery or museum devoted to contemporary art well knows.

The truth is that the prevailing situation is one that is good for cultural hucksters but bad for art—and for artists. It is especially bad for young, unestablished artists, who find themselves scrambling for recognition in an atmosphere in which the last thing that matters is artistic excellence. In one sense, what we have been witnessing is the application of the principle of affirmative action to culture. Art confers prestige, celebrity, wealth; it is a social and economic blessing; therefore, its perquisites must be available to all regardless of talent or accomplishment. The logic is impeccable: only the premise and the consequences are disastrous. If anything can be a work of art, then it follows that anyone can be an artist. Such ideas are not confined to the fringe. They are, in various degrees, a staple of establishment prejudice. One recalls Mr. John Hightower, a Rockefeller apparatchik who was briefly director of the Museum of Modern Art in the late 1960s. In one memorable effusion, Mr. Hightower publicly delivered himself of the opinion that "I happen to think that everybody is an artist."

Of course, Mr. Hightower represents something of a special case: it is not often given to us to encounter fatuity so deliciously blank and unadorned. But what matters is the extent to which Mr. High-

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tower was a bellwether. Perhaps few people in his position would have been so incautious; it surely would have occurred to most museum directors that indiscriminately bestowing the title of "artist" might have undesirable consequences for the status of the collections over which they preside. Yet Mr. Hightower articulated an assumption that, to one degree or another, informs much contemporary thinking about art and culture. It is a quintessentially Sixties assumption—there was a lot of starry-eyed talk about "unleashing creativity" then—but it is not only a Sixties assumption. It continues to resonate. The irony is that it is an assumption that conspires to rob artists of the things that should matter most to them: their talent and their art.

There are other ironies, too. There are more artists per square inch in our society today than ever before. Museums and galleries of contemporary art have sprouted like so many mushrooms across the country. Everywhere one turns there are appeals to "support the arts." And yet, and yet . . . is there not also a widespread sense of staleness, futility, disenchantment? And does this not have a lot to do with the character of today's celebrity art—"art-world art," the art that makes it into the Biennial exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art and is discussed in publications like *Artforum*?

When we look around at the contemporary art scene, we are struck not only by its promiscuous nature—by the fact that it is a living illustration of the proposition that anything can count as art today—but also by certain telltale symptoms. There is, first of all, its obsession with novelty. For those in thrall to the imperatives of the art world, the first question to be asked of a given work is not whether it is any good but whether it represents something discernibly new or different. Of course, the search for novelty has long since condemned its devotees to the undignified position of naïvely re-circulating various clichés: how little, really, our "cutting-edge" artists have added to the strategies of the Dadaists, the Futurists, the Surrealists. But the appetite for novelty—even if the result is only the illusion of novelty—is apparently stronger that the passion for historical self-awareness. Never mind that the search for novelty is itself one of modernity's hoariest maneuvers: for susceptible souls its siren call is irresistible.

A second, related, symptom is the art world's addiction to extremity. This follows as a natural corollary to the obsession with novelty. As the search for something new to say or do becomes ever more desperate, artists push themselves to make extreme gestures simply in order to be noticed. But here, too, an inexorably self-defeating logic has taken hold: at a time when so much art is routinely extreme and audiences have become inured to the most brutal spectacles, extremity itself becomes a commonplace. After one has had oneself nailed to a Volkswagen (as one "artist" did), what's left? Having oneself nailed to a Rolls-Royce? A Chevy? A Volvo? A Citroën? Without the sustaining, authoritative backdrop of the normal, extreme gestures—stylistic, moral, political—degenerate into a grim species of mannerism. Lacking any guiding aesthetic imperative, such gestures, no matter how shocking or repulsive they may be, are so many exercises in futility.

It is in part to compensate for this encroaching futility that the third symptom, the desire to marry art and politics, has become such a prominent feature of the contemporary art scene. When the artistic significance of art is at a minimum, politics rushes in to fill the void. From the crude political allegories of Leon Golub or Hans Haacke to the feminist sloganeering of Jenny Holzer, Karen Finley, or Cindy Sherman, much that goes under the name of art today is incomprehensible without reference to its political content. Indeed, in many cases what we see are nothing but political gestures that poach on the prestige of art in order to enhance their authority. Another word for this activity is propaganda, although at a moment when so much of art is given over to propagandizing the

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word seems inadequate. It goes without saying that the politics in question are as predictable as clockwork. Not only are they standard items on the prevailing tablet of left-wing pieties, they are also cartoon versions of the same. It's the political version of painting by number: AIDS, the homeless, "gender politics," the Third World, and the environment line up on one side with white hats, while capitalism, patriarchy, the United States, and traditional morality and religion assemble yonder in black hats.

The trinity of politics, novelty, and extremity goes a long way toward describing the complexion of the contemporary art world: its faddishness, its constant recourse to lurid images of sex and violence, its tendency to substitute a hectoring politics for artistic ambition. It also helps to put into perspective some of the changes that have taken place in the meaning and goals of art over the last hundred years or so. Closely allied to the search for novelty is a shift of attention away from beauty as the end of art. From the time of Cubism, at least, most "advanced" art (which is not necessarily synonymous with "good" art) has striven not for the beautiful but for more elliptical qualities: above all, perhaps, for *the interesting*, which in many respects has usurped beauty as the primary category of aesthetic delectation. (Readers of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* will be familiar with the consequences of elevating the interesting from an aesthetic desideratum into a moral imperative.)

At the same time, most self-consciously avant-garde artists have displayed considerably less interest in pleasing or delighting their viewers than in startling, shocking, even repulsing them. Not for nothing are "challenging" and "transgressive" among the most popular terms of critical *praise* today. The idea, of course, is that by abjuring beauty and refusing to please, the artist is better able to confront deeper, more authentic, more painful realities. And perhaps he is. But one mustn't overlook the element of posturing that often accompanies such existential divagations. Nor should one forget the many counter-examples and counter-tendencies. In a famous statement from 1908, when he was almost forty, Henri Matisse wrote that he dreamt of "an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which could be for every mental worker, for the business man as well as the man of letters, . . . something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue." Matisse was one of the greatest and also most innovative painters of the twentieth century. Does this vision of balance and serenity diminish his achievement?

To a large extent, the calamities of art today are due to the aftermath of the avant-garde: to all those "adversarial" gestures, poses, ambitions, and tactics that emerged and were legitimized in the 1880s and 1890s, flowered in the first half of this century, and now live a sort of posthumous existence in the frantic twilight of postmodernism.

In part, our present situation, like the avant-garde itself, is a complication (not to say a perversion) of our Romantic inheritance. The elevation of art from a didactic pastime to a prime spiritual resource, the self-conscious probing of inherited forms and artistic strictures, the image of the artist as a tortured, oppositional figure: all achieve a first maturity in Romanticism. These themes were exacerbated as the avant-garde developed from an impulse to a movement and finally into a tradition of its own.

The French critic Albert Thibaudet summarized some of the chief features of this burgeoning tradition in his reflections on the Symbolist movement in literature. Writing in 1936, Thibaudet noted that Symbolism "accustomed literature to the idea of indefinite revolution" and inaugurated a "new climate" in French literature: a climate characterized by "the chronic avant-gardism of poetry, the 'What's new?' of the 'informed' public, . . . the proliferation of schools and manifestos," and the ambition "to occupy that extreme point, to attain for an hour that crest of the wave in a

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tossing sea." The Symbolist revolution, Thibaudet concluded, "might perhaps have been definitively the last, because it incorporated the theme of chronic revolution into the normal condition of literature." Commenting on this passage in his 1972 essay "The Age of the Avant-Garde," Hilton Kramer observed that

> the "new climate" of 1885 has indeed become the "normal condition" of a good deal more than literature. It has become the basis of our entire cultural life. Thibaudet's "What's new?" is no longer the exclusive possession of a tiny "informed" public. It is now the daily concern of vast bureaucratic enterprises whose prosperity depends on keeping the question supplied with a steady flow of compelling but perishable answers.

The problem, as Mr. Kramer notes, is that the avant-garde has become a casualty of its own success. Having won battle after battle, it gradually transformed a recalcitrant bourgeois culture into a willing collaborator in its raids on established taste. But in this victory were the seeds of its own irrelevance, for without credible resistance, its oppositional gestures degenerated into a kind of aesthetic buffoonery. In this sense, the institutionalization of the avant-garde—what Clement Greenberg called "avant-gardism"—spells the death or at least the senility of the avant-garde.

The road to this senility—what we might call a juvenile senility—really begins with the "anti-art" movement of Dadaism. For with Dada the "chronic revolution" of which Thibaudet spoke is itself revolutionized, turned on its head. In this sense, Dada did not seek to provide yet another fresh answer to the question "What's new?" On the contrary, Dada sought to subvert the entire context in which the question gained urgency. That the extreme strategies of Dada, too, were quickly incorporated as part of that "chronic revolution" suggests that Thibaudet may have been justified in identifying the Symbolist revolution as "definitively the last." From this perspective, Dada, and every subsequent innovation, by definition appears as a variation on an already defined theme: an anti-theme, really, whose very negativity provides a foil for the ceaseless play of novelty. But in fact the incorporation of Dada into the fabric of the avant-garde did have consequences. For one thing, Dada altered the *tenor* of the avant-garde: Dada's adamant nihilism helped to short-circuit the essential seriousness of art. Dada might seek to occupy extreme points, but it did so out of a systematic contrariness: it had no ambition "to attain for an hour that crest of the wave in a tossing sea" because it had given up on the whole idea of art as a spiritual quest. Indeed, Dada was an art form that had given up on art.

In this respect, anyway, Dada appears as a kind of forerunner of Pop Art, the next stop on the itinerary. The architect Philip Johnson once observed that Postmodernism insinuated "the giggle" into architecture. He was, alas, right about that, and the same can be said about Pop Art: it insinuated the giggle into art. If there was a certain grimness about Dada's insouciance, Pop Art specialized in remaking art in the image of Camp. Pop Art was Dada lite: just as cynical, but without the kind of intellectual scruples that, for example, led Duchamp to abandon art for chess. Pop Art was a laughing form of nihilism, an art whose features compose themselves into a rictus of narcissistic despair while its practitioners eagerly dip their hands into the till of artistic celebrity and commercial success.

Many of these elements came together in that protracted assault on culture we sum up in the epithet "the Sixties." It was then that the senility of the avant-garde went mainstream: when a generalized liberationist ethos and anti-establishment attitude infiltrated our major cultural institutions and began forming a large component of established taste.

To get some sense of the contours of this established taste today, consider a recent article from the front page of the Sunday *New York Times* Arts & Leisure section, "Testing

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the Limits in a Culture of Excess," by Vicki Goldberg. It is not that this piece was significant in itself: indeed, its main point, that "the commercial sector has taken the lead away from art in the matter of breaking rules, abolishing taboos, pushing the envelope," isn't even correct. Whatever the tasteless excesses of Calvin Klein, they are as Pollyanna compared to the graphically pornographic and blasphemous staples upon which the art world habitually battens. No, the reason I cite this piece from the *Times* is because it perfectly epitomizes the bewilderments of received wisdom—if "wisdom" is the *mot juste*—and does so, moreover, in an influential organ that has lately identified itself with everything that is most trendy, ephemeral, and bogus in our culture.

In one sense, Miss Goldberg's piece is simply a catalogue of current clichés about art: "It was and is a prerogative of art to probe regions deemed off-limits"; the attempt "to breach the borders of the acceptable" was "the domain of art"; "such exploration was often transgressive and sometimes shocking," because "art, of course, challenges society's rules at every level." Yes. Of course. Like every other champion of this view of art, Miss Goldberg adduces the scandal over Manet's *Olympia* (1865) and other *causes célèbres*.

And yet, much as she celebrates the "challenging," "transgressive" role of art, it is also clear that she harbors some incipient qualms. "It seems," she muses, "that once repressive and hypocritical barriers were knocked down, the result was less liberation than binge. We have achieved a stunning triumph of excess." Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Miss Goldberg seems undecided. On the one hand, "the sexual liberation of images has a built-in imperative to escalate," which, she implies, may be grounds for concern. On the other hand, "No doubt it has done us some good along the way." Really? Miss Goldberg explains: "All the bedroom maneuvers on contemporary television soaps and in film may have helped a lot of people improve their sex lives." Is this pathetic or merely naïve? It is difficult to say. Miss Goldberg is troubled that the orgy of "liberation" she evokes has resulted less in "hedonism" than in "a free-floating anxiety and depression." If only hedonism had won out! "In a sense," she concludes, "we want popular imagery to substitute for lives we cannot achieve ourselves." But the problem, "the down side," is that "most lives cannot match" such "nonstop pleasure and excitement."

Miss Goldberg's disappointed hedonism and reflexive cultural radicalism are signs of the times. Although bristling with the rhetoric of "transgression," her position is in fact a summary of establishment prejudice. A sad commentary of the establishment, you might be thinking. But considered as a cautionary tale, it has some salutary lessons to teach. Stepping back and considering the image of art it assumes, we can perhaps begin to outline a response to the calamities of art with which we are living. For one thing, it is time that we recognized that art need not be adversarial or "transgressive" in order to be good or important. In this context, it is worth noting that great damage has been done—above all to artists but also to public taste—by romanticizing the tribulations of the nineteenth-century avant-garde. Everyone is brought up on stories of how an obtuse public scorned Manet, censored Gauguin, and drove poor Van Gogh to madness and suicide. But the fact that these great talents went unappreciated has had the undesirable effect of encouraging the thought that because one is unappreciated one is therefore a genius. It has also made it extremely difficult to expose fraudulent work as such. For any frank dismissal of art—especially art that cloaks itself in the mantle of the avant-garde—is immediately met by the rejoinder: "Ah, but they made fun of Cézanne, too: they thought that Stravinsky was a charlatan."

This is the easiest and also the most shallow response to criticism. The truth is that most art is bad. And in our time, most art is not only bad but also dishonest: a form of therapy or political grumbling masquerad-

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ing as art. Like everything important in human life, art must be judged on the basis of firsthand experience: no formula can be devised prescribing its assessment, including the formula that what is despised today will be championed as great work tomorrow. The art world today retains little of the idealism that permeated Romanticism, but it remains Romantic in its moralism and hubris about the salvific properties of art. In an unfortunate, jejune moment, Shelley wrote that poets were "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." This is an ambition that many artists continue, in more mundane ways, to harbor. But as W. H. Auden rightly pointed out, " 'The unacknowledged legislators of the world' describes the secret police, not the poets." Poetry, Auden said elsewhere, makes nothing happen: its province—like the province of all art—is in the realm of *making*, not doing. An artist, as the word's history reminds us, is first of all someone who *makes* something. And just as a table can be well or poorly made, so, too, a poem or a painting can be well or poorly made. This is not the only criterion that we employ to judge a work of art, but it is a fundamental starting point that no disinterested critic can afford to abandon.

Similar considerations apply to the ambition to make art "relevant" to contemporary social and political concerns. Of course, art cannot help being of its time and place, but the interesting question to ask about art that deliberately comments on its time is what makes it more than a mere commentary? What makes it art? As Goethe put it, "only the mediocre talent is always the captive of its time and must get its nourishment from the elements that time contains." The insistence that art reflect the tangled realities of contemporary life is a temptation that most artists should resist, if for no other reason than that giving in to that temptation is a prescription for ephemeralness.

What resources does an artist possess to combat the temptations of relevance? Apart from his talent, perhaps his greatest resource is tradition, for it is through tradition that he has his most palpable link with something that transcends the contingencies of the moment. As T. S. Eliot explained in a famous passage from "Tradition and the Individual Talent," tradition is not simply "following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes." "Tradition," Eliot continued,

> is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his generation in his bones, but with a feeling of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.

Eliot's aestheticizing conception of the historical sense may not be the bulwark against arbitrariness that he hoped it would be. But by underscoring the element of transcendence, he reminds us that an embrace of tradition is not the enemy but the condition of genuine innovation. It is in this sense that we should understand Hans Sedlmayr's observation that "many things that are classified as 'backward' . . . might be the starting-point of real inner progress." At a moment when the art world has abandoned art for political attitudinizing, the path forward begins with a movement of recuperation. In an age when anything can be a work of art, the question of whether something is art has ceased to be compelling: what matters is whether something is a good work of art, and about this the official art world has rendered itself *hors de combat*.

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Joy & terror: the poems of Josephine Jacobsen

by Elizabeth Spires

Art is long and life is short. Or is it the other way around? On the evidence of *In the Crevice of Time: New and Collected Poems*,[1] a 258-page volume that spans sixty years of poetic productivity, both art and life have been long and rewarding for Josephine Jacobsen.

The collected poems of a greatly gifted poet may not offer the suspense of a well-plotted novel, but there is still a certain drama in seeing the arc of a life's work fitted between the covers of one book. To read *In the Crevice of Time* is akin to watching some frightening or wondrous natural process, say a tree or flower blooming, captured in time-lapse photography—from the first stirrings of a germinal impulse to the rapid movement into individuality, maturity, and inevitable denouement. It's a disturbingly compressed tale of birth, change, growth, and oblivion. So it is with Josephine Jacobsen, who, at eighty-seven, has probably been writing longer than any other American poet living today, and who continues to write poems of extraordinary force and passion. Like the aging, prescient figure in "Hourglass," a recent poem, "She perfectly understands the calendar/ and the sun's passage. But she grips the leash/ and leans on the air that is hers and here."

Unlike many of her poetic contemporaries, Jacobsen has not pursued a particularly "literary" life. She was born in 1908, part of a generation that included Lowell, Bishop, Berryman, and Roethke. Her formal education ended with her graduation from high school; it had been decided early on by her mother (Jacobsen's father had died when she was five) that she would not go to college. In the spirit of the time, she married early and had a child. Her first four books, *Let Each Man Remember* (1940), *For the Unlost* (1946), *The Human Climate* (1953), and *The Animal Inside* (1966), published by smaller presses outside the circle of New York, did not establish her as a major poet of her generation, although by all rights they should have. She did not teach, nor was she deeply involved with the literary world until she was named Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1971, when she was sixty-three. For the most part, her writing was done "on the side," in brief intense spurts during isolated months at Yaddo and MacDowell, and during winter stays in the Caribbean, a locale to which she has always felt attracted because of its "wonderful sense of strangeness . . . which was totally other." With the publication of *The Shade-Seller*, in 1974, and *The Chinese Insomniacs*, in 1981, Jacobsen became better known, although even today she is still a "poet's poet." Despite receiving various awards and honors in the past decade, she has often been overlooked, especially when major anthologies have been compiled.

1 *In the Crevice of Time: New and Collected Poems*, by Josephine Jacobsen; The Johns Hopkins University Press, 258 pages, $29.95.

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Having said all that, and now having *In the Crevice of Time* in hand, does it matter? Of the 169 poems included here, several dozen are perfect and irreplaceable, far more than the precious half a dozen Randall Jarrell spoke of in his famous remark about poets spending their lives standing out in fields waiting for lightning to strike. A necessarily incomplete list of some of her best work would include, I think, "The Three Children," "My Uncle a Child," "Instances of Communication," "Poems for My Cousin," "The Starfish," "The Enemy of the Herds, the Lion," "The Birds," "Colloquy," "Daughter to Archeologist," "In the Crevice of Time," "The Mexican Peacock," "Treaty," "The Chanterelles," "The Shade-Seller," "Pondicherry Blues," "Notes toward Time," "The Sisters," "The Chosen," "Winter's Tale," "The Woods," "The Limbo Dancer," "Tears," "First Woman," "Reading on the Beach," and "Hourglass." *In the Crevice of Time* is a selection of only about two thirds of the approximately 250 poems included in her eight books, and any reader familiar with all of Jacobsen's work might easily add another dozen to the two dozen or so just mentioned.

Throughout her career, she has persistently chosen to write poems of an unnervingly pure lyric intensity. (About her early years she has written, "I had an unidentified craving for the lyrical.") She is a formal poet with the ability, when she wants to and the poem demands it, to be "free." She has, unfashionably, always been clear in her refusal to use personal, intimate experience in a direct or explicit way in her poems. What one observes in Jacobsen's poetry is experience worked into the very fabric of the poem, in its tone and stance, rather than experience overtly disclosed. In a memoir she explained, "If there is little trace in this account of . . . things which are darker, of pain and loss, it is never because these things were nonexistent, but because they are *in the very texture of writing* where they belong" (italics mine).

A Josephine Jacobsen poem will not come alive for the reader until this subtle texture is both intellectually processed and viscerally felt, the way meaning in spoken conversation is understood as much through a subtle tone of voice, a shift in inflection, as by simple denotation. Readers desirous of an explicit topical poem (which many readers seem to be these days) will go away from Jacobsen dissatisfied because her concerns are not so easily categorized. She is part traveler ("Born travelers must and will have terra incognita"), part archeologist ("We breathe through our future./ Remember me is the message"), and part seer ("I know all about what is/ happening in this city at just/ this moment; every last grain of dark I conceive").

In the Crevice of Time is arranged chronologically, beginning in 1935 and continuing up to 1994. Initially, Jacobsen moves through a period of literary influence, trying out various modes and styles, both romantic and modern. About her early models and influences, she said once, "If I have cause for gratitude, let it be to Robert Service, Rudyard Kipling; to Dante Gabriel Rossetti; to Keats, Yeats, and Donne." Here is Yeats in "Fergus and the Druid":

> I see my life go drifting like a river
> From change to change; I have been
> many things—
> A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
> Upon a sword, a fir tree on a hill,
> An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
> A king sitting upon a chair of gold . . .

And here is the young Jacobsen in "Winter Castle":

> I am many-minded, diverse-shaped:
> I am the horses, hay-warmed in the stalls,
> The snow-snagged spruces, and the starving
> hare
> Coursing the slopes of snow.

Other early poems, such as "For Any Member of the Security Police" or " 'It's a Cold Night,' Said Coney to Coney," show Jacobsen assimilating the influence of Auden. Much of her early work is characterized by a

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tight reining in of the subject matter, by an ironic or distanced treatment, and by the imposition of formal constraints, where lines are carefully counted out and fitted into set forms.

At around the age of forty, when many poets privately wonder, "What now?," Jacobsen stepped out from the shadow of influence and the confinement of closed forms to begin writing the poems that are most hers. Working outside of any poetic circle, she said of the process, "I was forced . . . to develop a sense of my own intention." And her intention, from almost the beginning, seemed to be to write a poetry in which "the experience, wherever found, is the experience of being taken out of oneself, simultaneous with an inner penetration to unity. In that respect, the aesthetic experience is similar to the religious experience, and vice versa."

The overriding thematic preoccupation of her poetry, from first to last, is impermanence and loss. Chief among the many questions that her poems seek to answer are these three: What is the difference between the animal and the human? How do humans know and communicate with one another? And, how shall we be reconciled to the fact of death? In "Notes toward Time," Jacobsen reflects that "the schizoid heart tells/ what is alive, by its dying." An early poem, "Spring, Says the Child," connects the child's (and poet's?) acquisition of language to the onset of consciousness, with its fateful recognition that all things die:

> There are words too ancient to be said by the lips of a child—
> Too old, too old for a child's soft reckoning—
> Ancient, terrible words, to a race unreconciled:
> *Death, spring* . . .
>
> The composite heart of man knows their awful age—
> They are frightening words to hear on a child's quick tongue.
> They overshadow, with their centuries' heritage,
> The tenderly young.
>
> *Death*, says the child, *spring*, says the child, and *heaven* . . .
> This is flesh against stone, warm hope against salt sea—
> This is all things soft, young, ignorant; this is even
> Mortality.

Here, as in so much of her poetry, Jacobsen presents human existence as having a disturbing double aspect: a precarious, desperate balancing of life and death forces, one light, one dark, one hopeful, one unassailably grim. The formal arrangement of the poem, with the abruptly cut-off fourth line of each stanza, heavily emphasizes the words *death*, *spring*, *tenderly young*, and *mortality*, the words almost a précis of the poem's argument. But even as Jacobsen acknowledges the fact of death, she also perceives nature's recurring cycles and promise, both cruel and hopeful. In the texture of the poem, one intuits a certain timeless knowledge: that the law of life is barbaric.

The concerns articulated in "Spring, Says the Child" have occupied and preoccupied Jacobsen for a lifetime. If we are "a race unreconciled," then where can we look for consolation? In "Instances of Communication," one of Jacobsen's most masterly poems, the poet traveler posits one answer:

> Almost nothing concerns me but communication.
> How strange: Up the Orinoco, once, far
> up the Orinoco after jungle miles, great flowerheads
> looping the treecrests, log-crocodiles, crocodile-logs, bob-haired
> Indians naked in praus: a small, hot, town
> and in an upper dining-room
> plashed at by a fountain, cooled by fans, guardian of a menu the size of a baby,
> speaking six languages, with seven capital cities behind his eyes, a headwaiter,
> a man, who said without hope, *"And when*

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does your ship sail?" And no one
said to him, *"What are you doing here?"*

In the hall of the inn at Mont Serrat I came
out of my room and
"Stand back, stand back!" cried the criada in her
softest Spanish, *"the bride—*
the bride is coming!" out of her room, down
the hall, down to the steps
on her way to the church, to the groom.
She was pale, and dark; she clouded
the carpet with the mist of her train, she moved
by me but turned and bent and caught
my fingerbones seeing me like fate, watching
the three of her, the old, tall, childhood girl,
the darkly seen half-a-thing, and the white
bride lost on the point of love, and *"Buenas,*
o buenas tardes!" she called into my ear, she
crushed my fingers and laughed with panic
into my widened eyes and went proudly on
whispering
over the hall runner.

I drove five madwomen down a roaring
redhot turnpike in a July
noon; the one behind me had a fur ragged
coat gathered about her in that furnace;
she reached in the horrid insides of a purse
and offered me a chocolate, liquid
and appalling. *"Look! Look! A bird!"*
I cried and flung it over the side
and munched my empty jaws as she turned
back, and cried: *"How good!"*
And while the others hummed and cursed,
and watched simply, suddenly she put
her lips—behind me—to my ear and soft
as liquid chocolate came purling
the obscene abuse. *"Hush, hush, Laura, hush,"*
said the nurse; *"the nice lady*
likes you!" Laura did not believe so, and
went on softly, slowly, lovingly,
with O such a misery of hate.

Underlying the deliberately difficult, rapid syntax of the first three stanzas is a sense of isolation and panic, madness and terror, in which the characters speak different languages, both literally and metaphorically. Throughout the poem, the narrator feels the press of other people's identities. She sees but cannot rescue the hopeless waiter from his remote exile; their conversation is limited by the empty language of social convention and by cultural boundaries. Likewise, she sees the Spanish bride in a mystical, transfigured state, but the girl's "o buenas tardes!" fails to adequately express the gravity of her wedding day, when her girlhood identity and innocence will be forfeited. And in the third stanza the narrator and nurse must suffer the obscenities of the madwoman Laura. All three vignettes contain disturbing examples of failed speech, and yet, playing against this, each also contains an example of the narrator's uncanny ability to fathom the interior of the people she observes. It is a Keatsian moment where the poet becomes a nerve-like receptor to the lives around her and finds herself in helpless, knowing communion with them.

In the final stanza, Jacobsen shifts from these painful, disturbing scenes of human communication to a sacramental communion:

In frosty Philadelphia the freighter lay and
loaded in the Sunday ice.
The great cranes swung, the huge nets
grabbed and everything echoed from cold:
docks, warehouses, freightrails, ships' prows;
everything clicked and echoed;
but it was possible to go down the long cold
docks over the strange dark street under
the dim sky into a cold great warehouse
Sunday still, up still cold stairs, along
a dark dim cold thin hall through a brown
door into a small square room with lit
peaky candles and kneeling take—cool, slick,
thin, little larger than a quarter—
God's blood and body charged with its speech.

Stanzas three and four are striking in their juxtapositions: we are led from the hot hell of the turnpike to the cold heaven of the "great warehouse," from the image of the obscene chocolate offered by Laura, an unwanted communion, to the Eucharistic host, a divine communion. In receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion, the speaker is in the grip of something powerfully

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symbolic, literally in communion with a wordless, mystical language, the antithesis of the obscene speech in stanza three. It is an epiphanal moment that takes us back to Jacobsen's remark that "the aesthetic experience is similar to the religious experience, and vice versa." For Jacobsen, faith and imagination are closely connected, not exclusive of each other, the physical world a place of potential symbol and metaphor, a place where divine speech—the speech of poetry and prayer—can exist. In "Instances of Communication," the world of imaginative experience and the world of religious experience brilliantly intersect and momentarily become one.

If religious faith is one form of consolation in a time-bound world, one path to epiphany, even more so for Jacobsen is art. In "The Interrupted," a poem about art and antiquity, she writes, "These [statues] escape from their maker's limit to rejoice us with hope." In the title poem of *In the Crevice of Time*, she describes the moment when a "hunter-priest" made the first cave painting, "his art an act of faith, his grave/ an act of art: for all,/ for all, a celebration and a burial." It is a recurring theme in Jacobsen's work. Art, for Jacobsen, connects us to the timeless and eternal, as in "The Enemy of the Herds, the Lion," a poem about a memento mori, a "decorated box-lid, ca. 2500 B.C., which was found in the grave of the Lady Shub-ad at Ur." The poet describes the image on the box as "a lion-sheep without division," predator and victim "tranced and ardent in the act of taking/ utter enough to be love." She asks, "What/ word did her box-beasts mean?" and considers various answers:

> Possi-
> bilities; the chic symbols
> of the day, on a fashionable jewel-toy,
> the owner modishly ignorant; or, corrupt,
> an added pulse to lust.
>
> Or:
> mocking, or wise, remembrance
> of innocent murder innocent death,
> the coupled ambiguous desire,
> at dinner, at dressing, at music.
>
> Or,
> best, and why not? of her meeting
> all quiet terror, surmounted by joy,
> to go to her grave with her; a pure
> mastery older than Ur.

Again, Jacobsen presents the twinned, inseparable aspects of human existence, its joy and terror, in her juxtaposition of life and death, death and art. (The phrase comes up again in "The Clock" where she writes, "In joy and terror/ I move in time where/ nothing points to error.") Hunter and hunted, death and life, are, in the poem's phrase, "without division." This idea of "terror, surmounted by joy," infuses much of Jacobsen's work and is absolutely central to understanding what she is about as a poet.

Although there are many Josephine Jacobsen poems that delight and entertain, she is, in her greatest poems, capable of staring death in the eye and drawing its wrenching lineaments down to the last wrinkle. This two-mindedness—in which she is both in the moment and yet also self-consciously aware of time's rapid passage—is perfectly embodied in "The Chanterelles," a poem about mushroom-gatherers. Even as they cook their find "in cream and Neufchâtel/ and onions, to devour it together close to the first flames," they are also aware that more deadly, poisonous mushrooms, "some single, breastbone white; others the color of dust, the color of rain," grow among the chanterelles in the dark fairy-tale wood. It is the experience of a happy picnicker in a sunlit field watching, out of the corner of her eye, a dark cloud approaching.

The recent poems that make up the last section of *In the Crevice of Time* are some of Jacobsen's very best. There is an open, direct, colloquial quality to them, and a remarkable sense of self-disclosure. Guises

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and disguises (Dickinson's "slant truth") are abandoned, poetic pretense dropped. In "Calling Collect," she implores someone on the other end of a telephone line, "For the love/ / of God let me hear your voice locate me./ Over distance, long, it is saying my name./ I speak to you," an address as much, perhaps, to her readers as to a personal beloved. Running through these poems is an intense desire to connect. One has only to scan the titles to see that time and death are very much on Jacobsen's mind: "Next Summer," "Survivor's Ballad," "The Chosen," "The Night Watchman," "Winter's Tale," "We Pray Most Earnestly," "You Can Take It with You," "The Blue-Eyed Exterminator," "The Thing about Crows," "The Shrivers," "Loss of Sounds," "Hourglass."

In "First Woman," the narrator observes a bleak winter landscape that mirrors her own ravaged spirit. The poem is a desperate interrogation of self, the poet reaching far back into the deep past to address the skeletal remains of "Lucy" (so named by archeologists), the earliest known woman:

> Do animals expect spring?
> Ground hard as rancor,
> wind colder than malice.
> Do they think that will change?
>
> Sky no color and low;
> grass is no color, and trees
> jerk in the bitter gust.
> In this air nothing flies.
>
> Do they believe it will change,
> grass be soft and lustrous,
> rigid earth crack
> from the push of petals,
>
> sky retreat into blue,
> the red wide rose breathe
> summer, and the butterfly
> err on sweet air?
>
> First woman, Lucy, or another,
> did you know it all waited
> somewhere to come back?
> On the first stripped, iron day
>
> did you believe that?
> On this merciless morning
> I wake, first woman,
> with what belief?

The vocabulary of "First Woman" speaks for the naked condition of the spirit and the violent elements that would destroy it: *rancor*, *malice*, *bitter*, *stripped*, *iron*, *merciless*. There is an immense projection of emotion outward onto the landscape, the poem nothing less than a harrowing self-portrait, a poem of brutal "inner weather." One of the most remarkable aspects of "First Woman" is the way Jacobsen pushes the possibilities of the lyric, so often centered in one moment, to encompass past, present, and future: the deep past of Lucy's original knowledge, the bitter present, and the hoped-for future with spring's "push of petals" and summer's "red wide rose." It is a poem poised on the brink of an abyss, a "crevice of time," but through a supreme act of will, the poet resists giving in to despair. In "First Woman" Jacobsen has gone full circle, from the first intimations of knowledge in her early poem "Spring, Says the Child" to the hardest and harshest recognitions imaginable, earned only through age and experience. It is one of the most successful contemporary lyrics I can think of.

Isn't it for this kind of truth-telling, this way of seeing that penetrates to the very core and marrow, that we read poetry? It seems no accident that a deliberately sibylline countenance floats on the cover on *In the Crevice of Time*, bringing to mind the Sibyl's proverbial words to Aeneas: "Yield not to disasters, but press onward the more bravely." In a long life of writing, Josephine Jacobsen has.

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Four poems by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore

translated & with an introduction by Louis Simpson

Literary history has not known what to make of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, née Marie Felicité Josèphe Desbordes. Born in 1786 at Douai in Flanders, she has been forgotten, rediscovered, and forgotten again. Shortly after her death Jules Janin remarked that she had already been forgotten. "Forgotten by whom, I ask you?" said Baudelaire. "By those who, feeling nothing, remember nothing." He said, "No poet was ever more natural; none was ever less artificial. No one has been able to imitate that charm, for it is entirely original and naïve."

If scholars have not known what to make of her works, they have been understood by poets. Her poetry is visionary, as Rimbaud's would be. It is Mallarmé's language that does not refer but *is*. Her poetry has the living immediacy of a lyric by Verlaine. Desbordes-Valmore's "Dans la Rue," a realistic description of the aftermath of a massacre in Lyon, must surely have been read by Rimbaud before he wrote the poem he titled "Le Mal."

Rimbaud brought her poetry to the attention of Verlaine. Proust, by way of Montesquiou, discovered her poems and borrowed the name Albertine for his novel. His reveries about "young girls in blossom" evoke the wonderful opening lines of Desbordes-Valmore's "Intermittent Dream of a Sad Night":

> Land of our fathers where at eventide
> Across the fields like waves young women glide!

Yves Bonnefoy in his edition of Desbordes-Valmore's poems suggests a reason for their neglect. In France poetry is still being read from the point of view of Romanticism, which remains "the greatest example of poetry that is profoundly masculine," impervious to the breakthrough her poetry represents, rejecting illusion and "the pretensions of the Me that are typical of Romanticism."

Desbordes-Valmore would look back at her childhood as idyllic. The people were attached to simple things and led uneventful lives. There were four children. Their father painted cabinets and made church ornaments. But Joseph Desbordes lost his clientele in the Revolution—the Terror came even to Douai and the church porch was destroyed. The Desbordes family was reduced to poverty.

In her autobiographical novel, *The Studio of a Painter*, Desbordes-Valmore tells how a swallows' nest is broken and the mother takes refuge on a neighboring roof. The father of the four young birds flies plaintively around her, then returns and takes the children one by one and throws them in the courtyard where they die. Marceline adds, "a short time after, I took ship with my mother, only my mother—to America—where no one was expecting us." The mother, Catherine Desbordes, decided to go to Guadeloupe where she had a cousin who was a rich planter. Apparently she was planning not to return. Her oldest daughter,

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Marceline, now fifteen, did not want to be separated from her. They spent a few months putting together enough money for the journey. They had a long, rough crossing, and arrived in Guadeloupe to find that there was an epidemic of yellow fever and that the rich cousin had just died. In a fortnight Catherine Desbordes, too, died of the fever. Her daughter managed to survive for eight months in the strange country where she knew no one. Sainte-Beuve says that she endured "frightful sufferings."

Marceline returned to her father's house in Douai. She had had some experience of acting and was engaged by the local theater, then by the theater in Rouen. She succeeded rapidly and acted often in Paris. She was also writing poems that were published in song books and almanacs.

In 1808 Marceline met Henri de Latouche. He was the editor of André Chenier's poems and had adopted Romantic attitudes. He was the kind of poseur who would be satirized by Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* as the clerk Léon. To impress Emma, Léon says that he likes to lie with a book by a wood and watch the sunset. He says that he adores the sea and mountain scenery. And Emma is . . . impressed. In Desbordes-Valmore's poems Latouche appears as "Oliver," who did not reciprocate her love. He came and went—in her poems one can almost hear him saying, "I won't be tied down." And yet she loved him . . . he was charming. Two years after their meeting she had a child by Latouche, a boy who died at the age of five.

Latouche would be a formative influence. She would be disillusioned, not with romance but the fake versions of feeling that Romanticism provided. Her experience of Latouche gave her poetry about love its realism. To love can be painful . . . love and sorrow at the loss of love are inseparable. But there is another side to this—as she says in "Intermittent Dream of a Sad Night," if love brings sorrow, sorrow brings with it the memory of love. The love restored in memory may be lifted to an overview that is religion, philosophy, or art. It is a consoling thought, and I do not think anyone else has stated it so succinctly. Proust says as much, but he is not succinct.

The man with whom Marceline made her life was very different from Latouche. Prosper Lanchantin, known as "Valmore," was an actor, a man of the theater, "without any mystery," Yves Bonnefoy remarks, "and even without much charm." As an actor he was sometimes whistled and Marceline had to reassure him.

She would speak in letters of "the friendship of marriage." This does not mean that it was a "loveless marriage"—it just wasn't a Bovarist's idea of love. She and her husband shared the hardships of a life in the theater, moving from place to place and not having a home of their own. There were days when money was lacking, and there were children to be cared for. There were days when Marceline was too pressed to write and her talent seemed to be going to waste. But her poems reflect a capacity for love that grew stronger with the passing of time.

In 1819, two years after they were married, she published her first book of poems, *Elegies, Marie et Romances*. The forms and style of her early poems are conventional—she is limited by what is expected of women. The religion she expresses is the Christianity that advises women to be resigned. But there are flashes of poetry in her descriptions of ordinary things. "My soul," she writes, "still like a bird skimmed the days as they passed."

Her strength is in the mature poems, where she speaks of a life close to nature. The central impulse is love of the father whose house she left as a girl to begin her terrible journey. The fields and woods of Douai were an extension of her father's life. She writes about the place of her birth as though it were a living thing. The sensual or erotic passages are not merely personal, they do not announce a "secret of the flesh." They are fused with the cry of a bird, the sound of a brook, "the gifts of life that men and women share and that ceaselessly the dream abandons but love renews."

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Dans la rue

par un jour funèbre de Lyon

La femme

Nous n'avons plus d'argent pour enterrer nos morts.
Le prêtre est là, marquant le pris des funérailles;
Et les corps étendus, troués par les mitrailles,
Attendent un linceul, une croix, un remords.

Le meurtre se fait roi. Le vainqueur siffle et passe.
Où va-t-il? Au Trèsor, toucher le prix du sang.
Il en a bien versé . . . mais sa main n'est pas lasse;
Elle a, sans le combattre, égorgé le passant.

Dieu l'a vu. Dieu cueillait comme des fleurs froissées
Les femmes, les enfants qui s'envolaient aux cieux.
Les hommes . . . les voilà dans le sang jusqu'aux yeux.
L'air n'a pu balayer tant d'âmes courroucées.

Elles ne veulent pas quitter leurs membres morts.
Le prêtre est là, marquant le prix des funérailles;
Et les corps étendus, troués par les mitrailles,
Attendent un linceul, une croix, un remords.

Les vivants n'osent plus se hasarder à vivre.
Sentinelle soldée au milieu du chemin,
La mort est un soldat qui vise et qui délivre
Le témoin révolté qui parlerait demain . . .

Des femmes

Prenons nos rubans noirs, pleurons toutes nos larmes;
On nous a défendu d'emporter nos meurtris.
Ils n'ont fait qu'un monceau de leurs pâles débris:
Dieu! bénissez-les tous; ils étaient tous sans armes!

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In the street

on a day of funerals at Lyon

The woman

We have run out of money to bury our dead.
The priest is there, figuring what the price will be,
And the corpses stretched out, holed by artillery,
Want a shroud, a cross, remorseful words to be said.

Murder is king. The victor whistles as he goes
To the Treasury, to be paid for blood he shed.
He has shed plenty, but his hand is not tired
From fighting. There was no fighting at all, God knows.

God picked up each soul like a perishing flower.
Women and chldren went flying up to the skies,
And men . . . there they are, in blood up to their eyes.
Angry souls, too many to be borne by the air.

They don't want to leave their members behind, the dead.
The priest is there, figuring what the price will be,
And the corpses stretched out, holed by artillery,
Want a shroud, a cross, remorseful words to be said.

Those who are still alive do not know where to go.
A paid sentinel in the middle of the way,
Death is a soldier who aims and they take away
The rebel who would stand witness tomorrow.

Women

Let us take our black ribbons, and wear one on the arm.
It has been forbidden to take the pale remains
Of our murdered. They have heaped them on the stones.
God bless them all! They were all of them unarmed.

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Les roses de Saadi

J'ai voulu ce matin te rapporter des roses;
Mais j'en avais tant pris dans mes ceintures closes
Que les noeuds trop serrés n'ont pu les contenir.

Les noeuds ont éclaté. Les roses envolées
Dans le vent, à la mer s'en sont toutes allées.
Elles ont suivi l'eau pour ne plus revenir.

La vague en a paru rouge et comme enflammée.
Ce soir, ma robe encore en est toute embaumée . . .
Respires-en sur moi l'odorant souvenir.

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The roses of Saadi

I wanted to bring you roses this morning.
There were so many I wanted to bring,
The knots at my waist could not hold so many.

The knots burst. All the roses took wing,
The air was filled with roses flying,
Carried by the wind, into the sea.

The waves are red, as though they are burning.
My dress still has the scent of the morning,
Remembering roses. Smell them on me.

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Les séparés

N'écris pas. Je suis triste, et je voudrais m'éteindre.
Les beaux étés sans toi, c'est la nuit sans flambeau.
J'ai refermé mes bras qui ne peuvent t'atteindre,
Et frapper à mon coeur, c'est frapper au tombeau.
N'écris pas!

N'écris pas. N'apprenons qu'à mourir à nous-mêmes.
Ne demande qu'à Dieu . . . qu'à toi, si je t'aimais!
Au fond de ton absence écouter que tu m'aimes,
C'est entendre le ciel sans y monter jamais.
N'écris pas!

N'écris pas. Je te crains; j'ai peur de ma mémoire;
Elle a gardé ta voix qui m'appelle souvent.
Ne montre pas l'eau vive à qui ne peut la boire.
Une chère écriture est un portrait vivant.
N'écris pas!

N'écris pas ces doux mots que je n'ose plus lire:
Il semble que ta voix les répand sur mon coeur;
Que je les vois brûler à travers ton sourire;
Il semble qu'un baiser les empreint sur mon coeur.
N'écris pas!

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Apart

Do not write. I am sad, and want my light put out.
Summers in your absence are as dark as a room.
I have closed my arms again. They must do without.
To knock at my heart is like knocking at a tomb.
Do not write!

Do not write. Let us learn to die, as best we may.
Did I love you? Ask God. Ask yourself. Do you know?
To hear that you love me, when you are far away,
Is like hearing from heaven and never to go.
Do not write!

Do not write. I fear you. I fear to remember,
For memory holds the voice I have often heard.
To the one who cannot drink, do not show water,
The beloved one's picture in the handwritten word.
Do not write!

Do not write those gentle words that I dare not see,
It seems that your voice is spreading them on my heart,
Across your smile, on fire, they appear to me,
It seems that a kiss is printing them on my heart.
Do not write!

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La couronne effeuillée

J'irai, j'irai porter ma couronne effeuillée
Au jardin de mon père où revit toute fleur;
J'y répandrai longtemps mon âme agenouillée:
Mon père a des secrets pour vaincre la douleur.

J'irai, J'irai lui dire, au moins avec mes larmes:
«Regardez, j'ai souffert . . .» il me regardera,
Et sous mes jours changés, sous mes pâleurs sans charmes,
Parce qu'il est mon père il me reconnaîtra.

Il dira: «C'est donc vous, chère âme désolée!
La terre manque-t-elle à vos pas égarés?
Chère âme, je suis Dieu: ne soyez plus troublée;
Voici votre maison, voici mon coeur, entrez!»

O clémence! ô douceur! ô saint refuge! ô père!
Votre enfant qui pleurait vous l'avez entendu!
Je vous obtiens déjà puisque je vous espère
Et que vous possédez tout ce que j'ai perdu.

Vous ne rejetez pas la fleur qui n'est plus belle,
Ce crime de la terre au ciel est pardonné.
Vous ne maudirez pas votre enfant infidèle,
Non d'avoir rien vendu, mais d'avoir tout donné.

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Withered laurel

I shall go, I shall take my withered laurel
To his garden where the flower lives again.
I shall pour my soul out to him as I kneel:
My father has secret ways of healing pain.

I shall go, I shall tell him, at least with tears,
"Look, I have suffered." And he will see.
Under my changed days and the pallor of years,
Because he is my father he will know me.

He will say, "There you are at last, dear sadness!
Do you still yearn for the earth you used to roam?
Dear soul, I am your God. Now be at peace:
Here is my heart, come in! Here is you home!"

O mercy! Sweetness! Holy refuge! Father,
You listened to your daughter when she wept!
I hoped for you and so already have you,
And everything that I have lost you kept.

You will not reject what is not beautiful:
Heaven pardons what the world holds criminal.
You will not damn your child who was unfaithful,
Not for having nothing, but for giving all.

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Theater

"Company" & company

by Mark Steyn

There's a moment in the Roundabout Theatre revival of *Company* which beautifully sums up the dilemma of Stephen Sondheim. It's at the top of Act II, when Bobby, the lone bachelor, and all his happily married friends sing "Side by Side by Side." As the title suggests, the number has a presentational, vaudevillian quality, and when, toward the end of Rob Marshall's inventive staging, the cast comes together to form a mechanical kickline, the audience bursts into happy, contented applause.

But wait a minute: the whole point of this chorus is that the mechanics don't work. In 1970, in the original production, Michael Bennett gave each husband and wife call-and-response tap breaks—except, when it comes to Bobby's turn, he has no one to tap with: that's the entire play in a four-count break. In the new production, Marshall's choreography extends the idea: Bobby is the odd man out, always out of step—as he raises his top hat, the others are lowering theirs, etc. It's a droll attempt to use the hokeyest of traditional dance vocabulary—buck 'n' wings, hats 'n' canes—to make a dramatic point. And how does the audience respond? It cheers the hokeyness, not the drama. It applauds the most robotic aspect of the scene—a dumb kickline you or I or anyone can do—not as a comment on character but as an escape from character. At the Roundabout all seats are $67.50, and you can hear the relief in the clapping: see, it is a *show* after all—just like the Rockettes . . . The customers have seduced the drama away from itself.

Who'd be an innovator on Broadway? These days, the very decision to buy a ticket to a live dramatic presentation is a conscious act of nostalgia. So no wonder audiences applaud what they know, what they recognize, what they've seen before. And this fall they've seen it *all* before: Carol Burnett, last on Broadway in *Fade Out, Fade In* (1965); Julie Andrews, who left for Hollywood after *Camelot* (1960); Carol Channing, indestructible star of *Hello, Dolly!* (1964). All three are, according to taste, formidable players, and all belong to the last generation of theater stars. But what are they playing? Burnett's carrying an in-jokey play about a couple of road-show Lunts (*Moon Over Buffalo*), Andrews is keeping an adaptation of her last hit movie afloat (*Victor/Victoria*), and as for Channing . . . well, a few years back on a burnt-out inner-city block in Los Angeles there was a billboard bearing the evangelical imprecation "JESUS, SAVE US FROM HELL" which some wag had amended to "JESUS, SAVE US FROM HELLO DOLLY REVIVALS." But what else is there? This fall's trio of stellar openings wrap up what's left of the commercial theater: revivals, old movies recycled, and shows about shows. Indeed, Carol Channing's degeneration into her own Hirschfeld caricature can serve as a paradigm of Broadway over the last thirty years: like her, it has become a coarse, vul-

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gar, pop-eyed parody of itself. No wonder Sondheim, a guy who sets out to parody Broadway *intentionally*, has such a hard job getting his point across.

He was a nobody until *Company*. All he'd done previously was write three solid hits, one after another: *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962). But *Company* inaugurated the Sondheim we know today —the acerbic artist too good for the tired businessmen, the bridge-and-tunnel crowd, the matinee ladies. He's musical theater's first genius. Oh, sure, they called Gershwin a genius, and Bernstein. But Gershwin wrote for the concert hall, and Bernstein conducted there. Sondheim is the first to achieve genius status *just* by writing musicals—which is quite a feat.

He missed the Sixties. He fulfilled a deathbed promise to his mentor Oscar Hammerstein to do a show with Richard Rodgers (it flopped) and then laid low until 1970, when he returned with *Company*. Musical theater gets round to everything a little late, and it's tempting to see Sondheim in the Seventies as a belated Broadway response to Sixties rebellion. Here was the brattish nephew of Rodgers and Hammerstein telling the Great White Way that marriage is worthless (*Company*), that all middle-aged lives are failures (*Follies*), that U.S. foreign policy sucks (*Pacific Overtures*), that we're all potential Charlie Mansons (*Sweeney Todd*). In the record biz, you can clean up with this kind of stuff. But, on Broadway, where most of your potential audience are the sort of married, middle-aged failures you're eviscerating on stage, it seems mad.

The thing is, it sort of worked. Sondheim made it big on the scale of his flops, earning a popular unpopularity hitherto unknown in the commercial theater. Reluctant lyricist to the leading exponents of musical comedy (Jule Styne), the musical play (Richard Rodgers), and the modern through-choreographed musical (Leonard Bernstein), he wound up as heir to the triple crown. Stephen Sondheim is the biggest name on Broadway, and now the only name on Broadway. To non-Broadway fans, Broadway was a parochial backwater and its musicals were all the same; no matter the subject, the treatment was the usual old formula. Sondheim has broadened their content and their form to embrace mass murder and pointillism; he's given us plotless musicals and characterless musicals and musicals that go backward. But, in expanding Broadway's frontiers, he seems to have shrunk its population base. In the old days, Broadway made Broadway musicals that were like Broadway musicals, and everybody loved them; now Sondheim gives us kabuki musicals, and no one loves them but midtown Manhattan. Once, the shows were parochial; now, the audiences are. With Sondheim, the Broadway musical resembles a failing political party, a mass movement shriveled away to its core activists.

"Steve has all the skills of Larry Hart or Ira Gershwin," Alan Jay Lerner once told me, "but, unlike them, he doesn't reach out and touch." Or as Sammy Cahn put it: "He's scared to say I love you." A lot of us are—though, if you write for the musical theater, it's more of a problem. Last year, in a bizarre interview with *The New York Times*, Sondheim declared that at last he'd found love, as we'd hear in his new show, *Passion*. In *Passion*, the big love song goes like this:

> Loving you is not a choice
> It's who I am . . .

And you think: is that really an expression of love? or an intellectual defense of it?

Passion, adapted from Ettore Scola's film *Passione d'Amore*, opened with an arresting image: Clara, played by the voluptuous strawberry blonde Marin Mazzie, nude and straddling her lover. It looks like passion, but it doesn't sound like it. As much as any Brit hit mega-spectacle, the moment depends on a visual effect: the actress is naked, but the song isn't; Sondheim is always clothed, always veiled. In *Passion*, much of

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the evening is passed with the principals singing love letters back and forth to each other. It's emblematic of his work: not direct expression but a considered text; not passion but a consideration of passion.

Scott Ellis's revival of *Company* is a reminder of the lost hopes Sondheim once represented. George Furth's book was originally written as a series of one-act plays taking a brittle, sour look at various midtown marriages. In theme and structure, it's not dissimilar to John Updike's *Couples*, which appeared a year or two before. Both Updike and Sondheim are often accused of being too polished, too honed in their writing, but it seems to me that, whereas Updike's glittering sentences expose and confront his characters' feelings and failings, Sondheim's glittering lyrics evade and obscure feeling. It's not a question of love or hate or marital despair or middle-aged failure; it's about honest expression. In *Company*'s twitchy, urban pop score there's a song called "Another Hundred People"—about the hundreds and hundreds of people swarming off the buses and trains and out of the subways into the city. It's a shame that it's not better sung in this production because the setting—a girl on a Central Park bench—and the central image are terrific for a New York song. But, better than that, it captures the frantic loneliness of city life with a directness Sondheim has rarely found since:

> And they meet at parties
> Through the friends of friends
> Who they never know
> Will you pick me up
> Or do I meet you there
> Or shall we let it go?

I would have liked to have heard more of *that* Sondheim. Instead, *Company* is celebrated for its scabrous commentaries on modern life. It's . . .

> The concerts you enjoy together
> Neighbors you annoy together
> Children you destroy together
> That keep marriage intact.

It's these set pieces which work best in the revival, especially Veanne Cox's hysterical bride declaring that she's not "Getting Married Today." And, of course, there's the song about the rich, bored uptown wives that planted a phrase in the language: "The Ladies Who Lunch." But do they still exist? At the National Theatre in London a couple of years back, asked whether a revival of *Company* would need to update the play, Sondheim said no, it should be done as a period piece. The lyrics are smack dab in 1970, full of "chicks" who "swing" because they've read "the Kama Sutra." But Scott Ellis's revival tries to be timeless and, in so doing, exposes the dishonesty in the piece. As much as Updike's, these couples are of their moment. A similar group in the Manhattan of 1995 would include some marrieds, some divorces, some significant others, probably a token gay couple—but none of them would feel obliged to be married or feel the need to hustle Bobby into it.

Remembering that musicals get round to everything later than anyone else, you wonder if this isn't one of those coded dramas like Tennessee Williams's: in other words, Bobby isn't married because he's gay. But, if anything, the 1995 version is even coyer about that. In 1970, the girls, despairing of Bobby's inability to sustain a "long-term relationship," sing:

> I could understand a person
> If it's not a person's bag . . .
> I could understand a person
> If a person was a fag . . .

In the new production's only lyric revision, they now sing:

> I could understand a person
> If he possibly was gay . . .

For Boyd Gaines, Robert is an impossible role. But, in the context of Sondheim's sub-

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sequent career, it seems peculiarly autobiographical. Robert is a practiced bachelor unable to commit himself to whole-hearted love, a failing made more explicit in this production by Ellis's decision to restore a number cut from the original as a new Act I finale: "Marry Me a Little"—which from its very title seems to encapsulate Sondheim's ambivalence about romance and awkwardness in self-expression. It would be foolish to speculate on any resonances this might have in the composer's personal life, but it does find echoes in his work. Andrew Lloyd Webber, whose scores aspire to the inviolability of opera, is routinely despised as crowd-pleasing schlock; Sondheim, whose merest trifles are hailed as high art, is actually an old-fashioned assignment writer. It was the pap-peddling Lloyd Webber who found himself consumed by obsessions that, for better or worse, he had no choice but to write out: he had, in a word, passion. With the exception of *Sweeney Todd*, Sondheim's never initiated any of his shows: *Company*, *Follies*, and *Pacific Overtures* all started out as straight plays—until Hal Prince decided they needed bumping up with music. Thus, the composer and the character of Robert exist in the same relationship to the rest of the piece. Just as Sondheim was brought in late in the day to connect up Furth's sketches, so Robert was created late in the day as a character through which the various marriages would be seen. He is a cypher, he is a device. As the ever-changing permutations of his name—Robert, Bobby, Bob—suggest, he's defined only by whoever he happens to be in the room with. In 1970, when Prince and Sondheim were inventing the "concept musical," they were more concerned with non-linear narratives and star themes rather than star characters. But that's why the play fails fully to satisfy, operating instead as a series of variety turns. Why isn't Robert married? Not because he's scared of long-term relationships. Not because he's gay. The reason he's not married is so Furth and Sondheim can do a show. He's a piece of enabling machinery, and the audience instinctively smells something phony. That's the danger with high-concept theater: like the Pompidou Center, the plumbing is all on the outside.

So, as always, you come away marveling at Sondheim's mastery of technique. "You Could Drive a Person Crazy," for example, is a pastiche of a Twenties pop song, and you know that when Sondheim writes "but worse'n that, a person that" it's a conscious reference to Dorothy Fields in "I Must Have That Man": "I miss that person much worse'n just bad . . ." What he can't do, as Miss Fields could, is "I'm in the Mood for Love" or "The Way You Look Tonight." Sondheim is a fabulous summation of all that's gone before and a denial of any kind of future.

It's instructive to compare the revival of *Company* with the "art musical" (their designation) that opened twenty-four hours later at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. *Alice* has a spoken text by Paul Schmidt and songs by Tom Waits and Kathleen Brennan, the whole staged by Robert Wilson. A few years ago, Wilson told me that he and Sondheim were collaborating on a new theater piece. It never happened and I can't say I'm surprised. Sondheim's personal revolution was not the same as the wider one swirling about him at the time. If the Sixties revolted against anything, it was the discipline of form. So, although *Alice* contains nods toward pastiche, toward cabaret and music hall, Tom Waits doesn't know enough to be able to nail anything precisely. Pluck any couplet at random and you'll find an impure rhyme:

> You haven't looked at me that way in years
> You dreamed me up and left me here . . .

I'm old-fashioned enough, as Sondheim is, to believe that "years" doesn't rhyme with "here." Waits would probably argue, as Paul Simon and Randy Newman and the other aging pop writers now belatedly seeking refuge in the theater do, that it's not the rhyme, it's the thought that counts. But the

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discipline of rhyme sharpens the thought, forcing you toward fresh images, unexpected turns of phrase. The carelessness of impure rhyme eventually infects the rest of the work.

Mind you, in a Robert Wilson show the words are no more than decorative molding, irrelevant to the architecture of the piece. *Alice* is Wilson's take on Lewis Carroll and, in this bilingual production from the Thalia Theater of Hamburg, Alice's adventures are a pageant of minimalism, German Expressionism, kabuki, hardcore S&M, etc. You wouldn't be surprised to find elements of these in a Sondheim show, but it's unlikely you'd find them *all* in *one* show. Richard Rodgers used to say that, in a successful musical, the orchestrations sound the way the costumes look: in other words, the elements blend so that you're no longer aware of them as elements, only as part of the whole—just as when you drink a glass of water, you don't go, "Mmm, the H_2's really good this morning, but the O's a little off." This is the discipline to which Sondheim submits. He wrote the opening number of *Company* so that the note under "lo-o-o-ove" was sustained long enough for the elevators on Boris Aronson's set to bring the cast down to stage level: the song sounds the way the set looks. But, at a Wilson evening, the elements are all, the fact that they *don't* blend is the whole point. It's significant that the creators of this kind of show, eschewing "musical theater" as a term evoking Broadway piffle, prefer to call it "music theater performance art" or some such variation thereof—the procession of unconnected nouns aptly conveying the non-integration of the constituent parts. Wilson sees it as "creative tension" between the visuals and the text and the score. To him and his recent collaborators—William Burroughs, Tom Waits, Lou Reed—the criteria which govern adaptation in the American musical tend toward homogeneity. It's a measure of decline that the thirty-year time-warp Broadway now finds itself in is hailed as a return to the Golden Age. At the time, *Camelot* was regarded as stale off-cuts from *My Fair Lady*; *Fade Out, Fade In* just faded out, and, although *Hello, Dolly!* became the longest-running Broadway show to date, it represents the triumph of professional efficiency over artistic impulse: in its adaptation of Thornton Wilder, its principal achievement is consistency of tone—a quality Wilson despises.

For form, Wilson substitutes style. The Rev. Charles Dodgson, author of the Alice books, appears as a Weimar cabaret clown. But why? Sammy Cahn once wrote a song claiming that "you've either got or you haven't got/ style"—I expect he was thinking of Astaire or Garbo or Dietrich. But, in the modern era, style means Madonna dressing up as Marlene for a three-minute pop video; style is a series of glib, unfelt poses. Give Wilson half an hour and an entire twentieth-century vaudeville comes parading by—a cornucopia of chic cultural references. But hardly any of them connect with Alice or Dodgson. Form, in the best sense of the word, is the structure the material demands. Style, in the Wilson sense, is imposed on the material regardless. As the years go by, the bankruptcy of the approach becomes harder to avoid. You know you've run out of ideas when you decide to adapt *Alice* (in recent years, we've seen Gavin Millar's *Dreamchild*, David del Tredici's ballet, a version by the film composer Carl Davis and the English satirist John Wells). Especially if you decide to adapt it as a savage indictment of sexual repression in Victorian England. The Alice books are a nonsense work; Wilson is a nonsense artist; but put 'em together and they cancel each other out. His insight into the material is pedestrian and single-minded, starting from the moment when Alice meets the caterpillar and he inflates into a sort of giant condom. Soon, the Mad Hatter and a very dykey Duchess are reminiscing, in music-hall fashion, about their days as Anglican clerics and a favorite altar boy who was into bondage. Poor us. We're not repressed about bondage or pedophilia, but we are repressed in a way which has far greater im-

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plications for our culture. We're losing the power of historical imagination, the ability to understand worlds other than ours. Personally, I prefer the discipline of Sondheim to the indulgences of Wilson but both seem to have difficulty with human feeling, with living within a character. Both depend for their celebrity on the groundwork done by the unsung, untrendy, unprofiled foot-soldiers who pioneered all the styles and images and references they so gleefully cannibalize. Sondheim's preoccupation with form has led to no new form: the concept musical was supposed to be about things like marriage; it wound up with *Cats*. Similarly, Wilson's preoccupation with style has led to no new style: as much as *Hello, Dolly!*, he recycles what we already know. True form and true style arise organically from story and character. What's striking about both *Company* and *Alice* is that, for all the technical gloss, neither has anything new to say on its subject: the treatment is all.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

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Art

Claude Monet in Chicago

by Karen Wilkin

Was there any pressing need, apart from the considerable (if unfashionable) pleasure of seeing a lot of fine pictures, for the Art Institute of Chicago to organize a major Monet retrospective, his largest exhibition to date, drawn from public and private collections all over the world?[1] Over the past few years, the art of Monet and his colleagues has been probed from every possible direction. Recently, "Origins of Impressionism" studied the young Monet and his fellow New Painters in relation to both the establishment and the radical artists of their day, while the Art Institute's own brilliant "series" exhibition examined Monet's repetitions and variations of his favorite motifs. The lush survey of his late work, "Monet's Years at Giverny," was a while ago—1978—but a representative mini-Monet retrospective can be seen any day at the Metropolitan, not to mention the spectacular three-panel *Water Lilies* at MOMA, which attracts a perpetual worshipful crowd.

The cynical answer to the question is a resounding "yes," for purely mercenary reasons. Impressionism and Monet are box-office at museums these days and can do a great deal to attract much-needed funds. (I suspect that attendance at Chicago's retrospective would have been just as high if the museum had resisted billing Monet as "perhaps the most famous artist of all time . . . known and loved as the pioneer of Impressionism who changed the way we see the world.") But the answer is also a resounding "yes" for wholly non-cynical reasons. It's difficult to imagine, today, that any of Monet's works ever looked challenging or problematic, which is why contextual exhibitions like "Origins of Impressionism" are so informative and why the Chicago retrospective is necessary and, ultimately, so satisfying. The show is an intelligent, comprehensive selection of both familiar and obscure works that delight the intellect as well as the eye. Through thoughtful groupings and provocatively weighted choices, it forces you look freshly at even pictures you know well, so that the whole range of Monet's achievement is made clear: his virtuosity, his ambition, his daring, his shrewdness, his pragmatism, his poetry, and his cantankerous individuality.

The exhibition's curator and author of its catalogue, Charles F. Stuckey, argues that Monet has been undervalued as a seminal modernist. While Cézanne's late work has been seen as prefiguring many later innovations, even the most remarkable of his friend Monet's mature paintings have usually been relegated "to a limbo for masterpieces made too late to matter much." Art

1 "Claude Monet: 1840–1926" opened at the Art Institute of Chicago on July 22, 1995, and remains on view through November 26. A catalogue of the exhibition, written by the show's curator, Charles F. Stuckey, has been published by the Art Institute of Chicago and Thames & Hudson (282 pages, $50; $29.95 paper).

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historians who recognize Monet's importance have concentrated only on the aspects of his method that anticipate practices common among American artists since the 1940s—his habit of painting and exhibiting series of pictures and his way of working with loose, over-scaled brushstrokes across the entire surface of the canvas.

There are, of course, important aesthetic reasons for Cézanne's being regarded as modernism's ur-figure, most obviously, his profound and long-lasting influence on Picasso, Braque, and Matisse, but Stuckey has a point. Monet painted vigorously and inventively throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century, but although he lived to see the advent of Fauvism, Analytic Cubism, Synthetic Cubism, Futurism, Dada, and Surrealism (he died in 1926, aged eighty-six, two years after the publication of the first Surrealist Manifesto), even his most daring post-1900 *Water Lilies* are seen as belonging to the nineteenth century; Cézanne, who was only a year older, died in 1906, *before* Cubism was "deduced" from the implications of his paintings, so that his role as precursor is undisputed.

Stuckey describes Monet's late *Water Lilies* as being "on a par with the most highly acclaimed early masterpieces of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse," and maintains that Monet's lifelong innovation and audacity went far beyond even this radical reconception of landscape. "Like so many twentieth-century artists who have stressed 'nothing' as the ultimate theme," Stuckey notes, "Monet conceived his primary subject as empty space . . . what he called the 'envelope' of interactive colored light previously taken for granted by artists who focused on people and things." With maturity, moreover, "Monet used his unique understanding of the empty envelope as a vehicle to comment on the basic contingencies of all experience: space and time."

The Chicago exhibition goes a long way toward bearing out Stuckey's contentions. The earliest works, painted between 1865 and 1867, announce Monet's prodigious talent with characteristics that would persist for the rest of his life: his unfailing eye for nuances of tonality, his robust touch, and his uncanny ability to evoke the experience of being outdoors with patches of color. Whether painting the seashore in brilliant sunshine, a rocky estuary under ominous clouds, or a busy port in moonlight, Monet always seemed to get it *right*, orchestrating broad passages of clear, unmodulated hues in a fashion at once utterly convincing and completely non-literal. The side-by-side installation of three celebrated seaside pictures of 1867, the Metropolitan's *Garden at Sainte-Adresse* and *Regatta at Sainte-Adresse* and Chicago's *The Beach at Sainte-Adresse*, make this evident. The trio of economically composed canvases share a common freshness and generosity of handling, but each has a distinctive light and temperature, suggested but not depicted by the young artist's rapid touch.

The surviving central panel of *Luncheon on the Grass* (1865–66, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) is testimony to Monet's ambition and what can only be called chutzpah. Unknown and impoverished, the twenty-five-year-old painter tackled an epic, updated version of a Salon *machine*—"Poussin done over from nature," as Cézanne later put it—made contemporary and painted *en plein air*. (He did it more than once, most unforgettably, perhaps, in the Musée d'Orsay's dazzling canvas of women in billowing white dresses in a sun-struck garden.) In the radiant fragment exhibited in Chicago, a life-sized group of Monet's friends appear with snapshot immediacy, at a picnic. Everything is transient, mobile. Figures seem unposed, caught in mid-gesture, mid-sentence; sunlight filters through leafy trees, setting up a staccato rhythm of brightness that boldly cuts across faces, hands, details of costume, and the picnic provisions with no regard for their relative importance in the "narrative." As in the *Water Lilies*, painted more than half a century later, the entire surface of *Luncheon on the Grass* is animated by an energetic, cursive brushstroke that all but detaches from description as it sets down

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patches of glowing color. The picture vividly brings to life Monet's famous remark about observing and painting colored shapes without thinking about what they might be attached to.

The paintings of the 1870s make a case for Monet's continuing vigor, throughout the evolution of "orthodox" Impressionism. Scenes of shimmering rivers and exuberant gardens, glimpses of his family, and views of modern urban life, all painted with a brisk stroke and broken color, support Stuckey's assertion that Monet's real subjects were the intangible and the unstable. Even *The Red Kerchief: Portrait of Camille Monet* (late 1860s–early 1870s, Cleveland Museum of Art) appears to be more a glimpse of the momentary than a prolonged examination of a particular person. This astonishing picture is dominated by an assertive "picture within a picture," a pair of French doors hung with white curtains; outside, anchored by the mullions, a woman with a cadmium-red shawl over her head glances at the painter—and at the viewer, transposed with the painter. Monet's wife may have stood patiently outside the window for her portrait, but she seems caught in passing. The snowy landscape argues against anyone's remaining motionless outdoors for an extended period, but what creates the sense of transience is the picture's forthright structure and speedy paint handling.

Some real surprises are to be found in the 1870s section: views of a bridge under repair and of a harbor at night that make you rethink the origins of Whistler's nocturnes of the same period. Groups of related pictures and reprisals of favorite themes prepare you for the serial images to come; two 1874 views of the port of Le Havre, in sunshine and in rain, make an eye-testing pair, one crisp and rhythmic, with a blue-cream palette sparked with rose and touches of red, the other loose and brushy, with subtle gray-browns played against dull, whitened blues.

An autumnal river scene with a flood of golden foliage and a snappy sailboat picture full of scudding clouds rendered with swipes of a big, loaded brush are among the seldom-seen treats from private collections, while the Musée d'Orsay's (possibly unfinished) decorative panel of white turkeys (1876–77) is as unlikely and enchanting as ever, with its looping brushwork and free-floating sweeps of improbable color—passages of acid green and luminous blue that cut across birds and field without changing rhythm or intensity. And suddenly, a room devoted to the paintings of Gare Saint-Lazare, Monet's paeans to nineteenth-century technology, in which the smoke-wreathed locomotives and the immense glass and iron shed of the station portend the reflections and watery surfaces of the last *Water Lilies*. The monochromatic *Track Signals Outside Saint-Lazare Station* (1877, Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hannover), floating black discs stamped emphatically on loosely scribbled clouds of smoke, is startlingly abstract.

With some exceptions, Monet's paintings of the 1880s have been called potboilers made by an increasingly successful painter to satisfy collectors. Stuckey's selection includes some florid, overly picturesque landscapes—the Italian town of Bordighera brought out the worst in Monet—whose full spectrum palette and insistent ribbony strokes achieve the level of, say, Renoir, at best. But there are also disconcerting stormy seascapes and surprising views of Belle-Ile and Etretat, one with a stretch of rosy beach that recalls Matisse's playful seawrack images of the Nice period. And even the sweetest, most apparently ingratiating of the "travel pictures" often proves surprisingly rigorous. Unexpected viewpoints create an odd, confrontational space that rescues many paintings from predictability, while a redeeming roughness and material density, invisible in reproduction, often cancel out excesses of color or overloading of detail.

By the 1890s, Monet had perfected his method of working serially, painting on first one canvas and then another and another for brief and intense periods, responding to

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subtle variations of light and atmosphere—sometimes arranging for wet pictures to be carried back to wherever he was staying, when he moved on to the next—returning to the sequence, light and weather permitting, on subsequent days. The exhibition includes a representative group of *Haystacks* (pedantically explicated as "wheatstacks" in the text panels), probably the best-known of the series, but only one each of the powerful *Rouen Cathedral* façades and *Poplars*. In compensation, it reunites eight of the late series *Houses of Parliament*, normally divided among far-flung collections, in an instructive but somewhat disappointing ensemble. Their near-tropical chroma is compelling, but their dominant image is so iconic and so unequivocally architectural that it is never fully subsumed by the fabric of color.

Instead, it declares itself as an all-too-recognizable place and object, an emblem of London, in a specific, non-pictorial space. By contrast, the near-abstract geometry of the haystacks, like the frontality of the cathedral façade, the row of poplars, and later, the Japanese bridge over the lily pond that Monet repeatedly painted after the turn of the century, neutralizes the image and allows the viewer to concentrate, as the artist must have done, on apparently ephemeral variations of hue, surface, and luminosity. The utterly familiar profile of the Houses of Parliament, in Monet's series, reads as an interruption of the real subject of the paintings: a dialogue of colored strokes between sky and river.

Throughout his long career, Monet returned again and again to the surface of water as a primary image, placing himself, for example, in his studio-boat on the expanse of the Seine, not simply, I suspect, to shift his viewpoint or to surround himself with his motif, but because he discovered in water absorbing pictorial challenges. In the last decades of Monet's life, the surface of his lily pond—reflective, mutable, and flat—proved the most provocative of subjects, unleashing in him an astonishing series of pictures ranging from the borderline saccharine to some of the most extreme paintings in the history of modernism. Stuckey's exhibition gives full weight to the works after 1900, most dramatically, perhaps, in an assembly of about sixteen of the forty-eight canvases in Monet's celebrated 1909 exhibition at the Durand-Ruel Gallery, "Les Nymphéas: Series de paysages d'eau." The schematic reconstruction of this enormously successful show underscores the difficulties inherent in trying to see the long-lived Monet whole and in the changing context of his times.

In the presence of these silken, downright *romantic* confections, it requires an effort to remember that the young Picasso was painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* at the same moment that the aged Monet was recording the shifting reflections of his pond, and that the young Matisse had completed *Le Bonheur de Vivre* before many of the "Nymphéas" in the Durand-Ruel exhibition had even been started. The cumulative effect of the installation is, curiously, to make Monet appear less audacious, rather than more. Some of the uniformly sized, over-sweetened pictures of the series seem positively Victorian in their *niceness*. But the last works in the show, the rough, ferociously stroked, large-scale *Water Lilies* of Monet's last decade, still have the power simultaneously to seduce (because of their phenomenal color) and to unsettle (because of their immediacy and intimacy). They unsettle almost literally, as well, because when Monet makes the surface of the pond congruent with the surface of the canvas, collapsing space and blurring distinctions between inverted reflections, lily pads, and blossoms, he dislocates the beholder, forever changing assumptions about how landscape can be presented and viewed. The best of these late pictures seem unquestionably modern, tough, inexhaustible.

Stuckey reminds us that Monet's pictures of this type were painted in the twentieth century. He calls them "revolutionary" and offers, but does not expand upon, a roster of artists whom he believes are the "too

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often unacknowledged direct heirs" to the persistent and wide-ranging influence of Monet's innovations, a sampling that includes Henri Matisse, Jean Arp, Marcel Duchamp, Piet Mondrian, Joan Miró, Yves Klein, Ellsworth Kelly, and Robert Smithson. (I suppose that Stuckey feels that the relationship between Monet's brand of all-overness and Jackson Pollock's has been sufficiently addressed, but he could have mentioned Jules Olitksi.) I am not alone in being intensely curious about what else Stuckey has to say about this list. But this is a quibble. The catalogue essay is a concise, tightly packed discussion of fascinating issues such as the complex connections between Monet and Cézanne, landscape-painting practice in general and Monet's in particular, Monet and his collectors, and the question of frames. The chronology is exhaustive and informative, amounting to a detailed biography in shorthand form. The illustrations, alas, are only feeble reminders of why the Monet exhibition is so exhilarating.

Exhibition notes

"Bill Jensen" at the Mary Boone Gallery, New York. September 9–October 21, 1995

Few venues in contemporary art are as redolent of hype, money, and celebrity—in short, glitz—as the Mary Boone Gallery in SoHo. Which is why it was so odd to see there, in a space synonymous with "art stars" like Eric Fischl and David Salle, the earnest, homely paintings of Bill Jensen. Jensen is, in many ways, the Anti-Glitz: an old-fashioned painter who has long pursued a modest-scale, quintessentially American brand of biomorphism. A lot of the people who wandered through Jensen's recent exhibition, his second in this gallery, probably did so just to see what was up at Boone that month. One likes to think, however, that at least some of them were in search of serious painting.

For Jensen is a serious painter, an artist in thrall to painting as a process of discovery. Each of his canvases is built up, scraped down, glazed, and started over again, the reworking continuing until the painting resolves itself, as if by magic. This entails, on the artist's part, a certain suspension of control, a willingness to stand back and let the painting go where it may. When things go right, it can be be a thrilling experience for the artist, with results just as thrilling for the viewer.

Jensen's work, however, is only rarely magical. It is, on the whole, murky and overworked. Most of his paintings are characterized by a certain laboriousness, and one imagines the artist clenching his teeth while at work in the studio. Even when one can't admire the painting, one admires the artist's dogged will.

What was most unexpected about Jensen's new paintings was the visibility of the canvas weave. Unlike his past work, with its thick, congested surfaces, these paintings —six abstract "landscapes"—were scraped down to the linen, and to the raw beginnings of their imagery: they were the first Jensen paintings I've seen that have some air in them. *Madame de Sade* (1995), a blonde washy ground populated by skittering lines, may be unfinished, but its irresolution signals an artist learning to ease up, if only a little. It is, one feels, a pivotal painting in the current series, and, perhaps, in Jensen's *oeuvre*.

There was still some of the "old" Jensen to be seen here. Jensen's difficulty in distinguishing between earthy colors and mud is summed up by the brown-black striations seen at the bottom of *Winter Light* (1994–95), marks that shun any presence they may have as color or surface. While the forms found in *Pagan* (1994) fit snugly into the painting's space, its colors are similarly lifeless. But there are signs that Jensen's color sense is improving. The silvery green-gray light of *Hour of the Wolf* (1994) shows him gaining depth as a colorist even if the painting's composition, with its division of fore-, middle-, and background, is uninspired. Indeed, if a painting with such a

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conventional denouement is all Jensen can arrive at, one wonders why he doesn't skip all the scraping and just paint the damn thing.

The composition of *Colossus* (1994–95) is also conventional, but it's a better painting. The division of the canvas into almost equal halves and its hazy glow have garnered Jensen comparisons to Rothko. It's a somewhat superficial comparison, as Jensen isn't interested in chromatic elegance or a dematerialized spirituality. He's after something more pithy. With its blue-green scars of paint and its obscured tangle of brushstrokes—does the latter describe the title figure?—*Colossus* is the one painting here that seems to have come about naturally. Instead of trying to wow us by showing how much work he can put into a painting, Jensen seems to have *flowed* with this one. The result is an image whose grittiness feels earned and whose melancholia resonates—Jensen just may yet catch up with his hero, Albert Pinkham Ryder. Is *Colossus* a fluke or a portent of work to come? Lovers of serious painting will hope for the latter and eagerly await Jensen's next exhibition.

—*Mario Naves*

"Alfred Stieglitz at Lake George"
at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
September 14, 1995–January 2, 1996

Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) has been a mythic figure in the annals of American art for so long a time that it comes as a real shock to discover that few of us have ever seen the full range of his accomplishment as a photographic artist. "Stieglitz is famous," writes John Szarkowski, "but his work is little known. No other major figure of photography's modern era is known by so short a list of pictures. . . . Stieglitz, whose life as a photographer spanned more than fifty years, has too often been anthologized from a standard list of half a dozen pictures, none of which was made during the last half of his working life."

It is to correct this misapprehension of Stieglitz's artistic achievement that Mr. Szarkowski organized the present exhibition and wrote the splendid catalogue that accompanies it. The result is a stunning revelation of a talent which we have never before seen exhibited on this scale.

The ninety-three pictures that Mr. Szarkowski has assembled in "Alfred Stieglitz at Lake George" were produced between the years 1914 and 1936. They mark a break with the aestheticism that characterized the earlier, better-known pictures of the Photo-Secession period. Bidding farewell to the aesthetic outlook that had governed the work of this earlier period, Stieglitz wrote that "there was too much thought of 'art,' too little of photography," and set about the task of transforming himself into another kind of photographic artist as he entered his fifties. He became, in effect, a member of a photographic generation younger than his own—the generation of Paul Strand and Charles Sheeler, whose break with the past, which was *his* past, opened up for Stieglitz a new photographic world, the world of immediate, quotidian experience, for him to conquer.

And conquer it he did, with all the zeal and vigor of a born-again talent. The Stieglitz of the Lake George pictures is not the imperious cosmopolite who introduced modernism to a philistine America, but an American artist determined to anchor his art in the freshly observed commonplaces of his own life and the life of nature for which he felt a personal affinity. Like many an artist before and after him, Stieglitz had to get out of New York—away from the politics and crossfire of the art world, a world he had in large part created—in order to fulfill his own artistic destiny. Stieglitz's preferred haven was the family home at Lake George in upstate New York, where friends, loved ones, and the familiar objects of nature could all be made to serve his new artistic purposes.

What Stieglitz produced as a result of this protracted act of withdrawal from urban distraction was a photographic *oeuvre* of amazing variety and virtuosity. Landscapes

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and portraits, a pellucid realism alternating with pictures that approach a purist abstraction, and a reach of feeling that ranges from the erotic to the humorous to the poignant to the sheerly transcendent: all follow in quick succession as we trace the course of the artist's headlong transformation of life into art.

Going through this exhibition, I was often reminded of the young Ernest Hemingway, who brought to American prose during the very years that Stieglitz was producing some of the Lake George pictures a vision and style analogous to his. There is a similar rejection of the old rhetoric, a similar pursuit of a radical and unadorned clarity, a similar recourse to a reverence for the natural world, and a similarly acute understanding of the ways in which modernist art offered lessons in meeting the needs of their respective media. Perhaps, in the end, a similar feeling of art in the service of a spiritual isolation.

Mr. Szarkowski has, in any case, amply succeeded in revising our understanding of Stieglitz's artistic achievement. For a while at least we can now retire our interest in Stieglitz the art dictator, Stieglitz the legendary lover, and the whole notion of Stieglitz as a cultural god. With this exhibition and its catalogue, Stieglitz is triumphantly restored to the pantheon of American masters.

—Hilton Kramer

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The media

Black & white & read all over

by James Bowman

When former Representative Mel Reynolds of Illinois was hauled off to the pokey last month for engaging in sexual relations with an underage girl, he nevertheless managed to strike a heroic pose. "When they shackle me," he said, "like they shackled my slave ancestors, and take me off to jail, nobody in this room will see me crawl." It was race hypocrisy on a scale almost to match that of Johnnie Cochran, who was widely supposed to have got O. J. Simpson acquitted of murder by comparing Detective Mark Fuhrman of the Los Angeles Police Department to the late dictator and mass-murderer Adolf Hitler.

Why did the respective courtrooms not burst into laughter at such extravagant comparisons? Our racial problem is not a lack of toleration but an excess of it —toleration, that is, of stupidity and mendacity and the most outrageous and self-serving nonsense when they come clothed in the garments of racial self-righteousness. And, of course, such toleration breeds still more outrageous and self-serving nonsense. It begins to look as if it is simply impossible to be honest about race in America. The controversy last year over *The Bell Curve*, by Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, made this pretty clear, but the events of the past month have confirmed it.

What *National Review* said about the American justice system in the wake of the Simpson trial—that "trials have become brownie-point contests between rival gangs of lawyers, conducted according to hermetic standards of judgment, and in a vacuum-tube of epistemological nihilism"—is also true of race relations. There is increasingly no common devotion to truth or objectivity to restrain the racial advocates of either side. Argument is a mere function of political strength. Which is why, later in the month, nearly half a million black men, most of them presumably in full possession of their faculties, were willing to be led to Washington by a certifiable lunatic—and why they insisted that they were really a million and a half.

It doesn't matter that Louis Farrakhan believes that he was taken up into a spaceship by aliens and told the secrets of the worldwide white conspiracy (I have heard him say this, though it is not the part of his message that gets on the evening news). Perhaps he doesn't really believe this but only says it to play on the credulity of those who also believe what they read in the supermarket tabloids. Or perhaps there is a kind of tacit agreement between them that he will pretend to believe it and they will pretend to believe him because they share in his purpose. For the purpose is simply that Farrakhan should be a big man, a man who can stand up to whitey on behalf of his fellow blacks.

So is O. J., for that matter. That jury instinctively knew what the rest of us have only learned subsequently: that the trial was not about O. J.'s guilt or innocence. It was

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about whether the law-enforcement establishment, seen as white, had enough strength to put away a black man in a black neighborhood. No way! It was like Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling to the black fight-fans: the only thing that mattered was that their champion was one of them. And why should we expect it to be otherwise? Often enough in the past a black man's skin color has got him convicted; now are blacks going graciously to decline the tacit invitation of the lately liberalized white establishment to make his skin color a reason to acquit him? I don't think so.

What must have been to blacks the most amusing thing about the Simpson affair was the spectacle of the white liberal media at first registering the horror of whites at Simpson's acquittal and at black celebrations of it and then desperately trying to find reasons for understanding what it imagined was the black point of view. Excuse me, they seemed to say, for not yet thinking up enough good reasons why O. J. didn't cut off his wife's and Mr. Goldman's heads, or why, if he did, he had a perfect right to cut them off. Jacob Weisberg, in *New York*, was one of the few who had the guts to pour the scorn on this attitude that it deserves. But even he seemed to me to miss the point slightly in calling the black attitude "the latest manifestation of Afrocentrism" and the new separatist impulse among blacks.

For what was at work in the reaction both to the Simpson verdict and to the Million Man March was not the search for what Weisberg calls "a viable program for change" but a chance to express feelings publicly, to strike an attitude, and to horrify and outrage those white liberals whose sense of racial guilt so predictably leads them to being horrified and outraged. As Nathan McCall said in *The Washington Post*: "In a very real way, the Million Man March represents a kind of therapy for black men." It is the therapy of standing up together and feeling strong, no doubt, but it is also the therapy of making the good liberals of *The Washington Post* and the rest of the media which came in for such a pasting wring their hands and agonize over how they have failed.

The *Post* in particular was predisposed to do just that thanks to Miss Ruth Shalit of *The New Republic*, who published in mid-September a 13,000-word piece called "Race in the Newsroom" documenting the state of race relations there. On Miss Shalit's showing, they are not good. And one is inclined to take her word for it if only because of the squeals of outrage emanating from the management of the *Post*. The other side of this outrage is what Miss Shalit calls the "penitential eagerness" with which Leonard Downie, Jr., the paper's executive editor, Robert Kaiser, the managing editor, and Michael Getler, the deputy managing editor for diversity [*sic*], tried to convince her that the *Post* as described in recent critical books by the black writers Jill Nelson and Nathan McCall is no more.

At the same time she reveals a nice understanding of the real nature of the problem without ever stating it. This is that for blacks at the *Post* and other such liberal institutions it is both pleasurable and profitable to attack the bosses who are so often pathetically eager to recruit them and keep them happy. ("Neither McCall nor Nelson would talk to me for this story," Miss Shalit writes by the way. "Nelson was summering on the Vineyard; McCall, who has a movie deal in the works, was, according to his agent, 'all media-ed out.' ") The editors' response is invariably a mixture of febrile defensiveness and cringing apology. Please give us another chance! We'll do better next time. Just, in fact, as they did the last time. That was in 1993 when Getler was appointed as head of an internal task force to investigate the subject of race in the newsroom. Not surprisingly, the task force found that "racial and ethnic minority staffers say the *Post* is not doing what it can, and should, by them" and recommended that a deputy managing editor for diversity should be appointed.

Getler himself got the job, which involves

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"blasting stereotypes and preaching inclusion" and telling white staff members that "you can have [racist] attitudes that you're not even aware of." What *he* seems not to be aware of is how people are likely to react to the news that some bureaucratic hunter of unapproved thoughts and "attitudes" is poking about in their unconscious minds, looking for reasons to send them for re-educaton. Under the circumstances, it is the height of hypocrisy, as well of rhetorical confusion, to say as Getler does that "the *Post* is a very candid place. It's not defensive about itself. It's a place where you can say anything you want . . . It's a place that lays open its warts in order to fix them."

It doesn't take a medical degree to know that anyone who "lays open" warts is not going to "fix" them. But that's the *Post*'s story and it's sticking to it. Likewise, the paper stoutly maintains that, in the words of the Getler report, "diversity does not mean excluding white men or threatening their jobs. It does not mean . . . hiring unqualified or less qualified people." Likewise, it insists that its "diversity campaign has more to do with improving coverage than redressing past grievances." Any fool can see that these are blatant lies. Maybe diversity hiring is right and maybe it is wrong, but it is silly and typical of liberal hypocrisy to pretend that it is only the unsophisticated or the uneducated, those who have not the advantage of "diversity training," who believe that it is what it so patently and undeniably is.

Miss Shalit sardonically remarks: "But diversity training may not be sufficient to stem the current white backlash against affirmative action, which sometimes bubbles over into pure racial animosity." But sometimes it is hard to tell if her bubbling backlashes are ironic or if she really thinks that efforts toward "diversity training" ought to be redoubled. When she reports that some whites at the *Post* have been heard to say about some blacks: "She can't write a lick" or "He's dumb as a post," she goes on to refer to "the ugliness of these sentiments." Does she mean that it is ugly to say such things at all (is it impossible that black people might not be able to write or might actually be very stupid?) or only that ugliness is ugly? Perhaps there is a kind of hypocrisy which is necessary even to the reporting of hypocrisy when it comes to racial matters.

But the hysterical replies of Leonard Downie, Jr., and Donald Graham, who wrote lengthy letters to the editor of *The New Republic*, are the best indications that she has got it right. Downie accuses her of using "the maddening technique of big-lie propaganda" and of "racial McCarthyism"—charges so outrageous, I guess, because they are meant to cover the obvious "big lie," which he continues to defend, that "we have not adjusted standards in any way in our hiring of dozens of talented journalists of color who do distinguished work." He accuses *The New Republic* itself of being "nearly all-white" (the blacker-than-thou defense), and then, in his next paragraph, insists that she is quite wrong to suggest that "our hiring is being dictated by the numbers, forcing a compromising of standards."

The rest of his letter is a mixture of corrections of (mostly trivial) mistakes of fact and lawyerly evasions which affect not one whit the substance of her argument, together with a personal attack on her which does not scruple to mention her two apologies for plagiarism. Then Graham takes his turn with a similarly intemperate attack which concentrates on characterizing *The New Republic* as "the last practitioner of de facto segregation since Mississippi changed." His defense of everything the *Post* has ever done with regard to race was backed up by a number of the *Post*'s reporters, editors, and commentators in the pages of the *Post* over a period of several weeks, all of them apparently unaware that the more they deny it the more guilty they look.

But the absolute worst of the *Post*'s special pleading came from the last person who should have done it, the Ombudsman, Geneva Overholser. A few days before she

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wrote, it was revealed in *The Wall Street Journal* that Ms. Overholser, who is the former editor of *The Des Moines Register*, had just bought a house in Washington with David Westphal, her former deputy in Des Moines, who had left, seemingly by coincidence, at the same time—a time when they were both married to someone else. As she left the *Register* with strong words of criticism for its owners' failure of commitment to the noblest ends of the journalistic art, the news left something of a bad taste in the mouths of the many who had congratulated her for her courageous stand at the time.

Her response to this story and to Miss Shalit's attack on the *Post* was to fold them into one column headed: "When the Tables Are Turned." It is a model of mendacity and self-righteousness, which are unfortunately not entirely untypical of the *Post* or of other bastions of high-minded journalism. "It's a flawed piece," writes Ms. Overholser of "Race in the Newsroom," "but one that takes on that most powerful and delicate issue, race relations. More than a few people here have felt stung by factual errors and what they feel are misrepresentations of their views."

Oh dear! Poor people. I should have thought that they would be more stung by truth than by error, but the weaselly "what they feel" is meant to leave the question of Miss Shalit's "misrepresentations" open while at the same time suggesting that she could document them if she chose. But this kind of mealy-mouthed evasion is as nothing compared to her comments on her own personal life. She reiterates her insistence on the fact that her leaving the *Register* was for professional reasons and then writes: "At the time, my personal life was unsettled and unclear." This is not the same thing as saying the break-up of her marriage was entirely coincidental, now is it? "I wouldn't know for more than two months that my husband and I would be divorcing"—no, but you might have had a pretty good idea—"and I wouldn't know for longer than that how this next part of my life would take shape."

What does that mean? That she didn't know what block the house was on that she and Mr. Westphal (whose name she doesn't mention when she demurely admits that "now we are together in Washington") were going to buy? This is a positively Nixonian denial, and thus doubly rich coming from the Ombudsman of *The Washington Post*. It is so transparent it is laughable. But the best is yet to come:

> The main lesson for me is that such subtleties don't do well in the news process. I can repeat and repeat that I genuinely left the job for professional reasons. I can say that I couldn't have added then the truth about the course my personal life would take, because I didn't know. None of that holds the kind of power for people that this one fact holds: Eight months later, the two of us are together here in Washington.

Which is another way of saying that "actions speak louder than words" and isn't this a crying shame for a wordsmith like her? Why don't people just listen to her denials instead of putting two and two together as the base vulgar do? But she is suffering through it. Oh yes! She has become a better, a purer person on account of the unfair treatment she has received from her fellow scribes: "Another lesson of course is the empathy that this makes me feel for other people in the news. I'm feeling misrepresented and a little buffeted—familiar sentiments among news subjects." Nor is this the end of her self-improvement in adversity: "One thing I learned as this has progressed is that lots of journalists don't have much respect for themselves or for the trade. More than one has said to me, 'Rule number one is, don't talk to reporters.' "

What a laugh! I wonder if anyone added: Don't talk to reporters if you're guilty? But dear Ms. Overholser, in spite of all that the beasts have done to her, still believes that they have too mean an opinion of themselves—which is probably why they have

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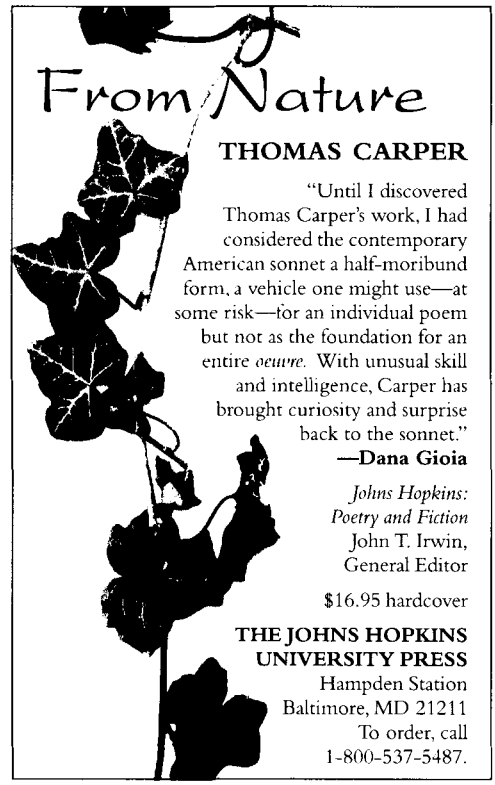
been mean to her. Never mind, it all evens out:

> The main thing for me is that this reconfirms something I've always felt. That is, accuracy in news is a cumulative thing. Over the course of my career, I've been uncomfortable with how glowingly some stories have portrayed me. Just as I'm uncomfortable now with how critically these do. But however faulty the specific pieces, I think news coverage about me over the years pretty much adds up to a comprehensive truth. And I think that's true of news coverage generally.

What chutzpah! The fact that she has been ludicrously overpraised in the past by journalists who, like her, are self-regarding and self-righteous about their higher calling is now supposed to make up for the fact that she has been caught in some pretty sleazy behavior. You couldn't find a better example of what's wrong with journalism—and, indeed, public life—in America today.

For we see something similar in her column on the Million Man March a few weeks later. "For a long time," she writes, "U.S. newspapers have contributed to the division among races by falling short of telling the story of all Americans." For example? "The wonderfully affirming stories of men and women celebrating their love through marriage were for years told in one skin tone only." Geneva understandably has affirming stories of celebrating love through marriage much on her mind lately. But now both she and the *Post* have plenty of reason to feel good about themselves: "This newsroom today is filled with men and women, young and old, of every color, looking like the world they cover. The results are uneven, but rich with promise." Of course there are problems. "Hurt and anger, ignorance and fear are everywhere. Recent events have shown anew that the *Post* staff also is filled with all those emotions. But it is filled too with a commonality of purpose that is hopeful as can be."

And so on and on like Little Merry Sunshine. Damn your emotions, Madam! Are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you getting facts straight or aren't you? And of course they are not. Such fuzzy, feel-good stuff pretty much sets the tone for the *Post*'s stupefyingly lengthy, boring, and euphemistic coverage of the march itself, which included "Style" section pieces on how "Behind the Scenes, the Women Count" in organizing the march, or, referring to Farrakhan's career before he became a prophet, "Louis Farrakhan, Calypso Charmer": (" 'Oh, honey, he was gorgeous,' remembers Daisy Voigt, who in those days wrote a teen column under the name Dizzy Dame Daisy.")

The news pages were, of course, more solemn:

> It was an overpoweringly positive event, one captured by an Arabic phrase that became the day's mantra, shouted from the podium and called in response by the crowd: "As-salaam alaikum."
>
> Peace be with you.
>
> Sun glinted off the Capitol dome, rising in the background like a promise. Tears welled in the eyes of Samuel Herbert, a cancer research technician from Buffalo. Around him was a sea of black men and black culture free of the myths so prevalent in American society.
>
> No guns, No drugs. Only dignity and hope . . .

No one would know from reading *The Washington Post* what five minutes of watching the march on television would have revealed: that speaker after speaker said hate-filled things about the "rich white men in power" who were repeatedly blamed for black people's problems. So far from being "A Day of Atonement" it was primarily a day of accusations. Former representative Gus Savage, who in 1992 had the unique distinction of having made Mel Reynolds look good, prefaced an attack on the Jews, South Koreans, and Vietnamese by saying that "Blacks should atone not for our anger but for not being angry enough." And where, as in Louis Farrakhan's speech, the anger was briefly turned on "drive-by shootings" and "car-jackings" that were destroying the black community, the withers of those present were unwrung. Like the cancer research technician, Samuel Herbert, they were largely professional or technical workers whose acquaintance with car-jacking was strictly limited. Only the injunction against filthy language may have struck home.

About Farrakhan's two-hour speech, which included fascinating discourses on numerology and other arcane subjects, the *Post* wrote only that "he lectured black men to atone for their shortcomings and dedicate themselves to a better future; denounced the country's founding fathers and the leaders of the modern Republican and Democratic parties; alternately argued with and reached out to critics; and spoke mystically of words, numbers and symbols that he said helped demonstrate that he had spoken for God in calling yesterday's march." It is true that, in the "Style" section, Ken Ringle was permitted a brief, lighthearted piece which poked gentle fun at Farrakhan's obviously paranoid numerological speculations as if this were some amusing quirk, a personal idiosyncrasy, which had inexplicably caused him to miss his chance to inspire the crowd with rhetoric the equal of Martin Luther King's. And Ringle had to qualify his criticisms by noting that "even his severest critics have to credit him for making the Million Man March happen," and that "he seemed to be reaching out in new directions, past the bitterness in his past speeches." What a pity then that he failed to take his audience "to rhetorical heights" and that the speech was "considerably less than one expected from the most electric public speaker in black America today." Pity, too, that he is a lunatic, I guess, but that we have to deduce for ourselves.

A few days before there had been a brief mention of Farrakhan's mental health in one of the huge numbers of pre-march articles, almost all of them up-beat or determinedly even-handed ("March's Direction," read the front-page headline that day: "Unifying or

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Divisive?"). Terry M. Neal in a profile of Farrakhan wrote:

> Some critics see him as a man with a penchant for paranoia, noting his frequent assertions that AIDS and drugs were purposely introduced into black communities by whites. His call for the march, he has said, was prompted by a vision that he had of being carried away to a spaceship where he met with Elijah Muhammad. Mindful that some have quietly snickered at the story, Farrakhan told a Washington audience recently, "I really don't care if you think I'm a nut."

Well, that's treating the story with kid gloves! What on earth is "a penchant for paranoia"? And "some critics see"? As if such an outrageous accusation as that whites were trying to kill blacks with AIDS and drugs were something—like, say, the O. J. verdict—that reasonable people could differ about. And does he say that it was "a vision" of a spaceship or does he say it was a spaceship? It was the latter when I heard him say it.

In an example of that healthy give-and-take on race at the *Post* refered to be Michael Getler, the next day's editorial page alluded to Neal's piece. Without mentioning it by name, the editorial writer criticized "the distancing language that has appeared in newspapers (including this one) in recent days and also in much of the reporting and commentary elsewhere." The prime example of this "distancing language" is the word "critics" ("or," the editorial adds parenthetically, "even more marginally 'some critics' ") —as if one were to say that "critics" objected to the racism of Mark Fuhrman instead of the simple fact that Mark Fuhrman was a racist.

The writer goes on to compare those who try to take the good out of Farrakhan to those who approved of the better purposes of Joseph McCarthy or George Wallace. The paper's editorials of the time hadn't approved of that kind of casuistry either.

Such hair-splitting arguments are usually addressed to white liberals, who still imagine that their approval is important to blacks. On the contrary. The positive aspects of Farrakhan's message have been delivered by others for years without much impact. What makes 400,000 blacks come to Washington for Farrakhan is more likely to be smug editorials in *The Washington Post* attacking him:

> Repeatedly, Minister Farrakhan exulted that he was the leader of the gathered assemblage, that he had been validated personally by the event, that you could not realize the legitimate goals that were set forth throughout the day and at the same time not accept his leadership. We don't think so.

Don't you indeed! It is typical of the patronizing *Post* to presume to tell the black multitudes on the mall that their coming had not been, as so many of them fondly imagined, a validation of Farrakhan's leadership. Oh no! The owners and editors of the *Post* knew better. They knew what had really been the intention of those who heeded the call of Farrakhan. Somehow I think that if I were black and read that editorial, it would have been enough to make me march. It would be precisely the fact that the *Post* and others in the white liberal establishment don't like him which would draw me to him. Their opposition means that he is scary and dangerous to them, that he is *bad*—and that's good!

It all reminds me of the serial-killer trading cards which, on the same day as the march, a federal judge said that Nassau County Long Island had no authority to ban. Maybe it didn't, but it was the attempt to ban them which put the seal on the cards' attractiveness for teenagers eager to strike an attitude. Minister Farrakhan is "bad" in the same way that gangsta rap is "bad"—and the relatively prosperous and gentle folk who turned out for the march love him for the same reason that middle-class white kids love the rappers: it is a pose which annoys people they like to annoy. The rappers

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annoy parents and teachers the same way that Farrakhan annoys the white establishment.

Now just as most of the kids who listen to rap would never dream of actually shooting cops or abusing women as "ho's" and "bitches" but like to be thought of, like Michael Jackson in military regalia, as "dangerous," so the mostly respectable, mostly employed, nearly entirely non-criminal crowds that turned out for the march don't hate Jews or white people or believe in the fantastical conspiracies of Farrakhan or the ludicrous rhetoric of many of his fellow speakers at the rally. But they know—and, more importantly, Farrakhan knows—that so long as the "rich white men in power" hate Farrakhan, he can't be all bad.

He is the symbol of an attitude whose importance is determined by the demands of the media theater which has so largely replaced more civilized forms of public discourse. Like Ice-T or Tupac Shakur, Farrakhan is a symbol of power to the powerless, the lower-middle classes who want to do better and fear doing worse who make up all fascist movements. Military regalia, whether of the jackboots and jodphurs variety or of the street-gang variety, is big. Those men on the mall knew that they were most of them better off than their fathers were and that their children were likely to be better off than they were. They were not the people involved in drive-by shootings and car-jackings; they were on the inside track compared with the ghetto kids of Anacostia just a couple of miles away. But it flattered them to think that they were being associated with the gun-toting kids in the street. Violence is romantic, and never more romantic than when the more or less alien power structure is afraid of it.

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Books

Demystifying Lincoln

by James W. Tuttleton

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.
—Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

David Herbert Donald has called his new biography, *Lincoln*, a book for the Nineties.[1] If it *is* a work for this time, Donald seems to mean that nowadays we no longer need any great mythic figures in the national pantheon. Donald's Lincoln is anything but the larger-than-life conquering hero whose sublime historical achievement was to have saved the Union and to have freed the slaves and whose apotheosis is monumentally evinced in that awesome, brooding memorial in Washington. Is it risky to think of Lincoln as a mythic hero. Idols, of course, invariably have clay feet; and it is probably wise not to stand too near them, as they have a way of burying their devotees as they come crashing down. Lincoln has always had a stature well in excess of his six feet four inches; and there have always been Lincoln critics ready to take him down a peg or two. This president is, in my view, a troubled and troubling figure. But to do justice to Lincoln one need not mythicize him. Does Donald do him justice?

It should be said at the outset that Donald's education and training have fully prepared him to do justice to the life of Lincoln. In fact, as the Charles Warren Professor Emeritus of American History at Harvard, Donald spent a long career in mastering the intricacies of nineteenth-century American history and politics and has produced, among other works, *Lincoln's Herndon* (1948), *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era* (1959), *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (1960), *The Politics of Reconstruction, 1863–1867* (1965), *The Nation in Crisis, 1861–1877* (1969), and *Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man* (1970). Donald's first work on Sumner won for him the Pulitzer Prize, as did his *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe* (1988). He is thus fully familiar with his material and is a prize-winning writer. In anticipation of a great popular success, *Lincoln* has already been selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club, the History Book Club, and Reader's Digest Condensed Books. It is manifestly intended as a work for specialists and generalists alike.

Yet I must confess at the outset that I found the book quite deflating. My reaction has nothing to do with the fullness of the book. It is comprehensive, accurate, and detailed, so far as I can judge. And Donald's *Lincoln* offers all the relevant biographical facts: Lincoln's birth in 1809 in rural Kentucky, his impoverished childhood in a makeshift log cabin in Indiana, his family's hand-to-mouth existence in Illinois, and his meager schooling but great avidity for learning. Donald takes us knowledgeably through Lincoln's early youth when he

1 *Lincoln*, by David Herbert Donald; Simon & Schuster, 714 pages, $35.

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supported himself by farming, clerking, running a local mill, and doing various odd jobs to make a living. We learn of Lincoln's youthful service as a postmaster, a surveyor, an aspiring politician, and a sometime soldier (in the Illinois militia during the Black Hawk Indian War in 1832).

In the course of telling Lincoln's story, Donald also provides us with a great deal of incidental information about Lincoln's early relationships: his cultivation of the "Clary's Grove Boys," the local rowdies who assured his first election in Illinois; his friendship with Joshua Speed, the storekeeper with whom he boarded for a time; his romantic involvements with Ann Rutledge (who died at twenty-two), with Mary Owens (to whom he was briefly engaged), and with Mary Todd (whom he married in 1842). His election to the presidency in 1860 and the Civil War isolated Lincoln from family and friends, and Donald's Lincoln seems a remote, impassive figure whose only concern came to be winning the war and saving the Union. His executive actions in respect to his generals—McClellan, Halleck, Grant, Sherman, and others—are narrated with shrewd understanding. His dithering over the slave question and emancipation is sensitively handled. And Donald's account of the shooting of Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth, on April 14, 1865, is affectingly told.

Still, I find this portrait of Lincoln is rather lacking in sharp resolution. And the reason may lie in Donald's decision to narrate his story wholly within the framework of information that Lincoln had available to him at any one time in his life:

> In tracing the life of Abraham Lincoln, I have asked at every stage of his career what he knew when he had to take critical actions, how he evaluated the evidence before him, and why he reached his decisions. It is, then, a biography written from Lincoln's point of view, using the information and ideas that were available to him.

Presidents should not of course be judged on the basis of knowledge that has only later come to light. But the effect of Donald's self-limitation is evident in the great "gaps" in Lincoln's "life" that other biographers have already filled for us. For instance, Robert E. Lee hardly figures in this biography because Lincoln knew little about him. Yet the elusive Confederate leader who kept Lincoln and his generals guessing for four years should inexorably be one of the major players in the landscape of any Lincoln biography. But the reader of Donald's Lincoln is allowed to know only what Lincoln gleaned from military dispatches and the like. As he readily concedes, almost nothing is provided "about the internal affairs of the Confederacy, because these were matters that Lincoln could not know about." Likewise, Lincoln's marriage to Mary Todd produces here a shadowy and perplexing woman because, presumably, Lincoln did not know what she was up to much of the time, and he could not understand her outbursts of weird spiritualism, her paranoia and manifest irrationalism. It could be argued, I suppose, that presidents have many unofficial sources of information. But whether Lincoln knew more than Donald gives us or not, it seems unnecessarily limiting to restrict the reader to "What did Lincoln know and when did he know it?" Most readers of history or historical biography want, I suspect, the big picture.

So far as the president's personality is concerned, much might be said about Donald's biography. But in the space available here, let me touch upon what I find most interesting in Donald's portrait: Lincoln's essential "passivity." Attorney General Bates recorded the following in his diary at the end of 1861: "he lacks *will* and *purpose*, and, I greatly fear, he has not *the power to command*." This was a common response to Lincoln. He drove to distraction both his friends and his enemies with the oft-repeated assertion that "my policy is to have no policy." To his enemies this meant that he had no principles and so was a dangerous opportunist.

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But Lincoln meant that he would take matters one step at a time, make each decision as it came up, and base the new decision on the effect of the last one. He remarked that "the pilots on our Western rivers steer from *point to point* as they call it —setting the course of the boat no farther than they can see; and that is all I propose to myself." This reluctance to define aggressively a policy in advance and then to execute it is not explained by Donald as a form of native American pragmatism. Donald sees Lincoln's passivity as grounded on his adherence to the "Doctrine of Necessity"—a belief that "the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control." This doctrine was not identical with the belief in a Higher Law espoused by Christians or even claimed by the abolitionists and transcendentalists in New England who rhapsodized over the Oversoul or the Universal Current of Being.

Lincoln was in fact a youthful prairie skeptic whose immersion in Voltaire, Volney, and Tom Paine had turned him away from his parents' Baptist fundamentalism. Condemned as "an open scoffer at Christianity" in the 1846 campaign for Congress and periodically denounced as a "Deist," Lincoln always insisted "I have never denied the truth of the Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular." This reassurance to the faithful may indicate merely that Lincoln was a good politician. But I mention the matter because as the Civil War carnage continued, Lincoln began to carry the Bible with him. He memorized many of its consoling passages, and he began to speak (often quite movingly) in the terms of nineteenth-century religious discourse. Although Mary Lincoln was right to say that her husband was never a "technical Christian," one affiliated with any particular church, Lincoln recognized during the Civil War that his religious ideas were undergoing a "process of crystallization."

As this crystallization occurred and as the war dragged on, Lincoln came increasingly to feel that it was not he and Jefferson Davis and their governments and generals who were killing these boys but God himself. God evidently did not want the end of the Civil War. God did not want it ended until some obscure purpose had been worked out. He told Mrs. Eliza P. Gurney that

> the purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. . . . We must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.

And to the editor of *The Frankfort Commonwealth* in Kentucky he said that "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years' struggle the nation's condition is not what either party, or any man devised, or expected. God alone can claim it."

David Herbert Donald is of the opinion that such fatalism as is here expressed was Lincoln's mode of escape from the moral burden it was his to bear, a projection onto "God" of a responsibility for unbearable slaughter that was actually a human responsibility—that of Lincoln, his cabinet, and his generals, that of Jefferson Davis and the flesh-and-blood powers of the Confederacy. Something of the same viewpoint was expressed a few years ago by Shelby Foote, who remarked, in *The Civil War: An Illustrated History* (1990), that

> Civil War Americans killed each other in such great numbers because of a failure on our part to find a way not to fight that war. It was because we failed to do the thing we really have

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> a genius for, which is compromise. Americans like to think of themselves as *un*compromising. But our true genius is for compromise. Our whole government's founded on it. And it failed.

These conclusions seem implicitly utopian to me. While ostensibly rationalistic, they are in fact visionary. Both historians assume that history can be controlled by rational thought and by deliberated action issuing therefrom. To the rational mind, political, social, racial, and religious differences can always be defused through negotiated compromise. Conflict resolution, they think, is always possible. Sometimes it is. But sometimes it is not. And neither historian can countenance the idea that historical developments may be beyond the capacity of man to control. But since men can barely control themselves, it seems unlikely that they could "dominate" history. Beyond this, it is evident that neither historian can countenance the idea that the unfolding of history may have a purpose that is non-human, providential, or divine.

Perhaps only a railsplitter like Lincoln, a man familiar with both Shakespeare and the blunt edge of the axe, could have fully appreciated *Hamlet*'s figure of one's "rough-hewn" destiny ultimately and more finely shaped by a Divinity beyond human comprehension. He had been elected to preserve the Union, not to free the slaves. And he told Horace Greeley, editor of *The New York Tribune*:

> My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do *not* believe it would help to save the Union.

But the irresistible feeling that a higher power was moving him from point to point in the twisting river of time evidently persuaded Lincoln that the freeing of the slaves must be *the key* to the salvation of the Union and to the hidden purposes of history. And so he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, on January 1, 1863. (Should we forget the fact of political maneuvering, that he was up for re-election the next year?)

Donald's Lincoln, though "one of the least experienced and most poorly prepared men ever elected to high office," is given high marks. But I come away from the biography troubled by many aspects of the man and his administration. Basically a case lawyer of routine litigation, Lincoln had no theoretical understanding of the law. Inexperienced, ill-organized, lacking in forcefulness, he was full of contradictions that confused and disabled his administrations. Moreover, while it is true that a Civil War erupted during his administration, requiring extraordinary measures for the safety of the Union, we have the duty to question whether some of his decisions were warranted by the actual peril: Lincoln's harsh invocation of martial law, his suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus*, his ignoring the decisions and orders of the Supreme Court, his arbitrary arrest of dissenters, and his closing down of antiwar newspapers. We think of these matters as involving the sacred constitutional rights of our citizens. Indeed, the Ohio congressman Clement L. Vallandigham charged that Lincoln's "repeated and persistent arbitrary arrests, the suspension of *habeas corpus*, the violation of freedom of the mails, of the private house, of the press and of speech, and all the other multiplied wrongs and outrages upon public liberty and private right" had turned the United States into "one of the worst despotisms on earth." Lincoln thought that the judgment of thoughtful men would be forgiving. It certainly is in the case of David Herbert Donald. Although this biography undertakes to demythicize and demystify Lincoln, he is still, for Donald, "the greatest American President."

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Davenport's Pleiad

Guy Davenport, translator
Seven Greeks: Archilochos, Sappho, Alkman, Anakreon, Herakleitos, Diogenes, Herondas.
With an introduction by the translator.
New Directions, 241 pages, $16.95 paper

reviewed by John Herington

In volume, at least, the American age of translation from classical poetry has already far surpassed the Elizabethan and Augustan ages. The tide of verse really began to flow with Lattimore's *Iliad* and the Chicago *Complete Greek Tragedies* in the 1950s; yet even now, at least two *Iliad*s, three *Odyssey*s, three *Aeneid*s, and uncounted Greek dramas later, we still look in vain for any informed survey of this staggering literary phenomenon, let alone of its impact on American education, American taste, and American poetry itself.

Anyone who undertook such a survey would probably have to begin by recognizing the single most profound difference between our twentieth-century verse translators and their Elizabethan and Augustan predecessors. In those ages most of the reading public knew and loved the Greek and Latin classics in the original tongues. What they asked about the latest translation of, say, a Roman satire was not whether it rendered the Latin words literally but whether it was itself an English poem worthy to rank with the original: how had the translator matched this stroke of Latin wit, or that sudden shift of rhythm, or that epigrammatic formulation, in such a way that his English verses, also, should haunt the memory like a tune? So, where Juvenal had written *Omnia novit/ Graeculus esuriens; in caelum iusseris ibit* ("The hungry Greekling knows it all; he'll go to Heaven if you tell him to"), Samuel Johnson wrote with quite equal pungency:

> All Sciences a fasting Monsieur knows,
> And bid him go to Hell, to Hell he goes.

By such skills *London: A Poem*, matching Juvenal in all the qualities that make a living satire, became a classic in its turn.

Our contemporary verse translators lie under no such constraints. They can be confident that almost none of their readers knows the classical poetry in the original, and that even those who chance to do so can no longer understand the economy of its language or the music of its verse-forms (for the classicists are now kept far too busy saving their necks by churning out secondary literature to pause over such imponderables). And what, on the whole, they give us correspondingly lacks the qualities that have always made the classical poems worth reading: it is essentially prose chopped up into any line-lengths that will suit the page, and containing scarcely a phrase that is likely to haunt the memory—except perhaps because of some particularly awful ineptitude or cacophony. "It is not poetry, but prose run mad." And yet this sort of stuff is marketed in massive quantities to the public (and above all to the young and defenseless public, the high-school and college students) as if it were identical to the poetry of Homer or Sophocles or Virgil; and is so taught, and so received. "Lattimore, Chapter Six" has become a fairly common way of citing the farewell of Hector and Andromache in the sixth book of the *Iliad*, even in quite august institutions of learning. The merchant translators of our time may well remind one of the War-God in Aeschylus, who receives living bodies and pays for them in ashes. Yet at least the War-God's clients knew that ashes were what they were getting. Do we? And have we really considered the creeping insensitivity to poetry itself that must result if we don't?

In this grim cultural context, Guy Davenport's translations offer hope as well as sheer delight. The book under review brings together seven Greek authors whom he has translated separately at various times over the last thirty years. Five of them are poets, dating from the seventh to the third cen-

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turies B.C.; the other two are philosophers, of the early fifth and the fourth centuries respectively, who expressed their highly unusual visions of our world in a prose that, for poignancy, economy, and wit, would put many a professed poet to shame. Davenport's introduction manages to pack into twenty-two pages a totally convincing apology for the study of the Greeks, and particularly—but not exclusively—the archaic Greeks. In his prose, just as in his verse translations, he shows a marvelous gift for making exactly the right connections in the fewest words possible. Archilochos, for example, "sometimes spoke with the vocabulary of a paratrooper sergeant," and Sappho sang of love "with Euclidean terseness and authority."

The first four authors in the book are archaic poets of the kind conventionally called "lyric," all of them famous masters in their day: Archilochos, Sappho, Alkman, and Anakreon. To translate them truly—that is, not just to slop roughly equivalent English words on the page in a pretty pattern, but to reawaken the song—is about as difficult a task as a translator can set himself. The chief difficulty is that Time has shattered all their work into sherds and splinters (just as he has shattered all ancient Greek lyric, except for parts of Pindar and Bacchylides). A second, and much less obvious, problem arises from the ambiguity residing in the term "lyric poet." Where an archaic Greek is concerned, do not envisage some pale scribbler driving his quill behind the closed shutters of Rome or Recanati; envisage rather a maker and setter of songs for parties (parties made up of highly civilized women, or rowdy seafarers, or bisexual courtiers in a despot's palace on an Aegean island), or else a choirmaster/choreographer, as Alkman was, devising and directing performances by men and women to delight the gods of Sparta. All these poems, in short, were created to interact with life, with life in many moods and many rhythms, and a good translator must let us feel this.

There is not much that Davenport or anybody else can do with the tiniest surviving splinters, although a surprising number even of these can challenge our imagination to construct the missing context for them, and so to build a new poem of our own: just what *was* the word "soda" doing in a poem of Sappho's (Fragment 197)? Or who was "drinking Eros" in Anakreon's Fragment 110, and why, and what did it taste like? It is, of course, in the fragments more than half a dozen Greek words long that Davenport's full genius for the translation of life as well as of poetry appears. Here he meets the resources of Greek with all the resources our language owns in rhythm, meter, rhyme, assonance, and verbal wit, and by playing off earlier English poetry. His version of Anakreon's Fragment 73, "Show me the way to go home./ I'm drunk and I need to go to bed," is a fine example of his allusive technique: a minute change in a modern music-hall song has not just captured most of Anakreon's literal meaning but has sent the rhythm and ambience of his poem winging straight to a modern reader's heart. A more sophisticated example is the translation of Anakreon's Fragment 53, an uncharacteristically melancholy poem on aging and dying which seems exactly suited to the meter and manner of *A Shropshire Lad* into which Davenport renders it (except for a neat metrical somersault in the last line):

> And now my hair is thin and white,
> Grizzled the locks above my ears.
> Youth's gone, and with it, all delight.
> My teeth are going with the years.
>
> What time remains is short and sweet.
> Therefore I often cry and dread
> Dark Tartaros where I shall meet
> In dreary rooms the weeping dead.
>
> For Hades' house is dark, and black
> The downward road, the hateful way,
> Unwilling and with no way back,
> Downward ever, and there to stay.

Most of the translations, however, simply come across as original and memorable

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English poems in their own right, with both the nearness and the distance of the Greek originals. A very few examples:

That is not Aphrodite in the ginger grass
But randy Eros batting flowers.
Touch not! Touch not! he cries.
(Alkman, Fragment 28)

Watch, Glaukos, Watch!
Heavy and high buckles the sea.
A cloud tall and straight
Has gathered on the Gyrean mountain-tops,
Forewarning of thunder, lightning, wind.
What we don't expect comes fearfully.
War, Glaukos, war.
(Archilochos, Fragment 50)

Percussion, salt and honey,
A quivering in the thighs;
He shakes me all over again,
Eros who cannot be thrown,
Who stalks on all fours
Like a beast.
(Sappho, Fragment 65)

Silence, O God,
Those who speak
Such awful Greek.
(Anakreon, Fragment 84)

Davenport's translation of Herakleitos seems to me the least satisfying of any in this book. Herakleitos was probably the most utterly original observer of the nature of things in Western history (analogies must be sought among the Buddhist sages), but he tended to deliver his observations in what, essentially, were riddles: their diction and syntax are the simplest imaginable, while their overtones are intimate. "Nature loves to hide" (Fragment 17, in Davenport's translation); "Character is fate" (Fragment 69); "Wisdom alone is whole, and is both willing and unwilling to be named Zeus" (Fragment 119). Such loaded simplicity leaves a translator no honest option but to render the Greek as literally as possible, and one can think of at least three English translations that offer a competent rendering of all the fragments in that way. The problem with Davenport's is that rather too often he inexplicably distorts or even abandons Herakleitos' text. Herakleitos wrote (and every scientist and scholar since must have understood his meaning perfectly), "Men dig up and search through much earth to find little gold" (Fragment 4). Davenport unbalances the thought by dropping the "little." Herakleitos wrote, "Time is a little boy playing checkers" (Fragment 24). Davenport turns this into "History is a child building a sand-castle by the sea," apparently because some commentators on the fragment have adduced the passage in Homer (*Iliad* 15:362) where Apollo is compared to a child building a sand-castle and tearing it down. This, frankly, seems wanton: at a single blow, Herakleitos is robbed of one stunning image and Homer of another.

Herakleitos may have died about 480 B.C.; the next of our seven Greeks, Diogenes the Dog, founder of the Cynic school of philosophy, lived from 404 to 323. In between, something happened about which this book is almost wholly silent, the so-called Classical Miracle. By Diogenes' birth the temples, statues, and porticos of Periclean Athens were firmly in place. Tragedy and comedy had reached heights that they were not to reach again in the next fifteen centuries, and history, oratory, ethics, metaphysics, and, not least, grammar were emerging sciences. The fascination of Diogenes is that he ridiculed all these achievements with something of the same wit and irony with which that equally spectacular eccentric, Samuel Butler, ridiculed the civilization of Victorian England. Diogenes' eccentricity, however, extended from his opinions into his lifestyle. He might well be the patron saint of all homeless persons, and not just because he chose to live in a barrel (actually in its Hellenic equivalent, a large storage-jar, or *pithos*): "The porches and streets of Athens were built for me as a place to live"; "I learned from the mice how to get along: no rent, no taxes, no grocery bill"; "Before begging it is useful to practice

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on statues." He saw straight through the boredoms and pretensions of emerging academe: "Grammarians without any character at all lecture us on that of Odysseus"; "At Khrysippos' lecture I saw the blank space coming up on the scroll, and said to the audience: Cheer up, fellows, land is in sight!" Nor was the Dog taken in by pompous talk about Athenian democracy: "I am Athens' one free man"; "I am *kosmopolites*, a citizen of the world."

By translating the sayings attributed to Diogenes, Davenport has restored to life a sage whom we perpetually need. He also reminds us of a side of the Greeks' genius that is often neglected by students of their epic and tragedy: their world-class talent, which actually rose to ever greater heights as their civilization passed its prime, for the bon mot and the funny story. Here I may quote just one sample, from a book of professor-jokes compiled near the end of classical antiquity and attributed to Hierokles the Neoplatonist:

> ACADEMIC A: Why, I heard you were dead.
> ACADEMIC B: But you can see that I'm not.
> ACADEMIC A: But I have it on a better authority than you that you're DEAD!

Infinite riches of this kind still await their Davenport.

We end, however, as we began, with Davenport's supreme talent for the liberation of poets from the realm of the dead. Poor Herondas! He was only trying to be funny in his modest Hellenistic way, but when papyri began to restore his work to us about a century ago, he fell into the hands of some of the greatest philologists and metrists of the time. It was no contest: the poet's antique cockleshell foundered almost instantly under the assault of those Cambridge ironclads, humming with all the most up-to-date sensing devices and bristling with the scholarly equivalents of Sidewinder missiles and Exocets. It is worth contemplating the opening lines of the most widely disseminated translation of Herondas, which resulted from these men's labors and is, incredibly, still in print:

> METRICHE: Threissa, list, a rap at the door: go see an any of ours be here from the estate.
> THREISSA: Who knocketh?
> GYLLIS: 'Tis I.
> THREISSA: Who art thou? Art afrayd to come nearer?

Und so weiter! Davenport has carried out the long-delayed salvage job simply by taking the *Mimes* of Herondas seriously and affectionately for what they almost certainly were: entertainments comparable in tone to music-hall skits, but composed in casual, laid-back verse and designed to be mimed in streets or squares by a busker with a hamper full of disguises. In his introduction, his stage directions and end notes, and above all the style of his translation, he has made a living performance possible once more, after twenty-two centuries of silence. May some actor accept the challenge.

Algonquin to Zukofsky

Kenneth T. Jackson, editor
The Encyclopedia of New York City.
Yale University Press/
The New-York Historical Society,
1350 pages, $60

reviewed by Francis Morrone

The best beer in the world is brewed in Belgium. To be certified as a brewmaster in that country, one must pass a rigorous test. As part of this test, the would-be brewmaster must replicate the American Budweiser. Why, one may reasonably wonder, would the brewing of the thin, pallid Budweiser be a test in a country renowned for its rich, complex ales? The reason is that the creation of a beer so characterless as Budweiser actually requires such a degree of accuracy—in, for example, getting one flavor

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to cancel out another—that it is indeed a test of the brewer's craft.

One suspects that some similar process resulted in the prose of *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, edited by Kenneth T. Jackson and recently published, to much fanfare, by Yale University Press and the New-York Historical Society. The encyclopedia's credits list twenty-six "project editors" and four "copy editors," in addition to various other kinds of editors, and so it is difficult to know exactly how the line-editing chores were divvied up. What's for sure, though, is that the words of the some 650 contributors have been thoroughly processed into a homogeneously bland pabulum. That process must have been so painstaking that one can only surmise that the editors were asked to endure some bizarre and exacting test.

Now, one does not go to a reference book of this sort in quest of sparkling prose. Such prose in such a work, rare as it is, is a bonus when encountered. I dwell on it, however, because it's the first of several things the reader encounters that point to this book's curious lack of richness and depth, of the multi-layered usability that elevates a reference book from a brick on a library shelf to an intellectual adventure. This elevation can be the result of the prose. When it is not, it can be the result of other things: cross-referencing, organization, choice and emphases of subjects, appendices, annotated bibliographies, graphic composition, and the like. In each of these areas, *The Encyclopedia of New York City* comes up short. It is, in the end, a dogged but pedestrian affair, a book one who is interested in New York history cannot afford not to own and consult, but, alas, a reference book of the type that elicits no special *frisson* each time one hauls it from its shelf.

Not that under ordinary circumstances such lack of *frisson* would be cause to be disappointed by a reference book. But the circumstances of *The Encyclopedia of New York City* are anything but ordinary. For this is one of the most eagerly anticipated, not to say hyped, reference books of our time. The tales are legion of the vast and impressive resources lavished upon this project, of the thirteen years, the million dollars, and the 650-plus contributors. Having followed the gestation of this encyclopedia nearly from its conception, I can say that it would be nothing less than disingenuous of this book's makers and partisans to suggest that it not be judged against its expectations. For those expectations were consciously crafted. There was a buzz about this project, louder in some years than in others, but never inaudible. At various points over these past thirteen years one has been led to expect something gargantuan, a kind of *Grove Dictionary* of New York City. The word "definitive" has been used in the book's publicity. One may, in this context, recall David Lodge's character Professor Morris Zapp, whose goal once was to write a book about Jane Austen that would say everything that could conceivably be said about Jane Austen, thus making it impossible for anyone ever again to write about her. Well, one wondered at times if this project weren't of Zappian dimensions. Sometimes the operative analogue was not Morris Zapp but Cecil B. DeMille.

At some point—later I believe than is indicated in the introduction to the book—it was decided to make this an encyclopedia for everyman: to keep its price as low as possible, its bulk trimmed, its entries elementary. Was this a wise decision? Thirteen years, a million dollars, 650 contributors later, and what we have—I do not exaggerate—is a book that a few skilled free-lance writers could have knocked together in a couple of years, with brisker prose and better cross-referencing (the editors of the present encyclopedia seem unaware of the existence of some of the excellent scholarly software which has greatly aided the making of reference books). Again, this is not to knock the book's absolute value as an alphabetized compendium of raw data. It is to consider the book against its own hype—and against its ostensible subject.

That subject is, of course, New York City.

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Yet one wonders, in perusing this tome, what "New York City" means. The preponderance of this volume's contributors are academics, either professors or graduate students engaged in some degree in a field, of recent vintage, called urban history, of which New York history may be said to be a branch. Unfortunately, urban history, because of its youth but more because it is being nurtured in our present, scandalously confused academic environment, is a kind of Humpty-Dumpty discipline, meaning whatever a particular practitioner wishes it to mean. Its academic antecedents seem to me to stem from two sources. One is the pan-disciplinary "cultural history" pioneered by such geniuses as Jacob Burckhardt and Johan Huizinga. The latter's magnum opus, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, remains to date our best object lesson in how to write about a place and time so as to show the interrelations among its people, events, beliefs, aspirations, creative impulses, and so on. Another academic source of urban history is the urban sociology practiced in Germany by Max Weber and Georg Simmel and in this country by Robert Ezra Park and his colleagues at the University of Chicago. One would think that any discipline spawned by the magnificent studies of men like Huizinga and Weber could not fail to prove exciting and enlightening. One would be wrong.

As is the fate of most good ideas in our day, "cultural history" and "urban history"—the very disciplines that have made it possible for us to consider "New York City" as a subject—have been infected by all manner of politically correct obliquities. Not that the encyclopedia is thumpingly PC: it is not, and that is a major relief. Indeed, Professor Jackson has been nothing less than courageous in speaking out against the excesses of multiculturalism. Owing, I suspect, to Professor Jackson's native good taste, there's precious little trace here of the gnostic urbanism practiced by such fashionable pseudo-scholars of New York City as Richard Sennett and Marshall Berman. What's happened, though, is that in our time cultural history has been "deconstructed" into something ever more vague and tendentious, namely something called "cultural studies." My reason for these metahistorical lucubrations is to try to arrive at some understanding, however imperfect, of the fact that there is, in Professor Kenneth Jackson's *Encyclopedia of New York City*, an entry for Barbra Streisand.

I swear that hers was the first entry I saw upon opening the encyclopedia. It's not so much that I regard Miss Streisand as one of the most odious public personalities of our day that bridles. I think that had the entry been for a popular singer and actress I enjoy, I'd still have been appalled. Barbra Streisand? It was thus only natural that I should next look up another of our vastly overpublicized "entertainers," and I flipped through the L's till I came to, yes, David Letterman. Is this the fate of cultural history? It alone is enough to make one understand why the very greatest practitioners of the discipline have chosen to concentrate their studies on the remote past. Let me say what, apparently, none of those twenty-six "project editors" managed to say: there is not now nor will there ever be a person who will need to consult or think to consult *The Encyclopedia of New York City* in order to learn who Barbra Streisand is or was.

The game was afoot: who was left out to make room for Streisand and Letterman? For starters, Jane Jacobs. Yes, Jane Jacobs. There is no entry for Jane Jacobs. It's not that planning theorists and critics were left out as a whole. Lewis Mumford's here, so is Charles Abrams, even Thomas Adams. When I mentioned to a friend that Jacobs was missing from the book, she said, "Well, you know, the academics hate her." Could this be it? And since Barbra Streisand lectured at Harvard Law School, are we thus to infer that the academics love her and that's why she's in the book?

Cultural history and urban sociology may have been the academic antecedents of the urban history that begat the New York history of which this encyclopedia is the

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would-be *summum bonum*. But there were non-academic antecedents as well. Indeed, until only forty or so years ago the entire field of New York history, which was born and grew with the city itself, was the preserve of "amateurs." These amateurs were the antiquarians and the custodians of local lore, traditions, natural and topographical history, and genealogy. The academics have made and continue to make important contributions, particularly in the meticulous identification and cataloguing of primary materials, and in the nailing-down of apocrypha. The art historian Francis Haskell, in his illuminating book *History and Its Images*, shows how older "amateur" —antiquarian, mainly—traditions fed the creation of the more formalized cultural-historical practices of men like Burckhardt and Huizinga. This process can be viewed in especially high relief in the matter of New York history.

It was thus with some interest that I was anxious to see the extent of *hommage* paid by the editors of *The Encyclopedia of New York City* to their "amateur" antecedents in the writing and compiling of historical and reference works on New York history. One would think that the history of New York history is a subject well within the purview of the present book. Such, alas, is not the case. There are no entries on the principal nineteenth-century historians of the city: not Mary Booth, not Henry Stiles, not even the redoubtable Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer, who with an amateur's passion created hefty works which remain founts of accurate data and graceful prose. Missing are Reginald Pelham Bolton, Maud Wilder Goodwin and the City History Club, James Riker, the mapmakers George and Walter Bromley, and Issacher Cozzens, who wrote the first (and still useful) geological history of New York City. There is no mention of William Loring Andrews and the Society of Iconophiles, and distressingly scant mention indeed of one of the Society's august members, New York's greatest historian, Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes. To be fair, there is an entry for Stokes, by Deborah S.

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Gardner, and it is not bad. What bridles, however, is how, in the book's introduction, following a mannered encomium to the worth of Stokes's achievement, the reader is apprised: "But Phelps Stokes concentrated on the natural environment." Did the author of that sentence—Professor Jackson? it is not clear—ever *read* Stokes? (And what's with the "Phelps Stokes"? The surname is Stokes.)

There is no entry for Moses King, whose *Handbook of New York City* is one of the essential New York City reference works, and none for Henry Collins Brown, who wrote or compiled outstanding works on New York history and who was the first director of the Museum of the City of New York. (There is, to be sure, a single entry on "Histories," by Harold Eugene Mahan, but it is inadequate and does not even mention most of the writers I've just cited.)

Though entries abound on New York–based artists and art movements, those artists, chiefly printmakers, who took New York for their subject are given rather short shrift. There is an entry for Eliza Greatorex, but no mention of her sister Matilda Pratt Despard, and there are no entries for Samuel Hollyer or Charles F. W. Mielatz. Yet *The Encyclopedia of New York City* makes sure we know who Keith Haring and the Guerrilla Girls were! And though there is coverage of New York's post–World War II ascendancy as an international art center, isn't it just a tad curious that there is no entry for Clement Greenberg, even if just to denounce him as a Cold Warrior? (There is an entry for Meyer Schapiro.)

I have already, in conversation, been accused of quibbling. Perhaps there is some merit to the accusation. After all, I am happy to own this book, and expect that I will refer to it often. But then, where's Egbert Viele?

Viele was a surveyor and cartographer of surpassing gifts (if abrasive personality) whose many works include the 1865 *Topographical and Hydrological Map of New York*, one of the most fabled and important graphic documents to come to us from the nineteenth-century city (and a map, incidentally, still in use among civil engineers). Viele was surveyor of Central Park, and promoter of the Arcade Railway, one of the many fascinating unbuilt public works projects in New York's history. There is, in *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, no entry for Viele. Is this quibbling? Is it to quibble to be affronted that there is no entry for the greatest of the nineteenth century's commentators on New York architecture, Montgomery Schuyler? (One senses, in the omissions of Van Rensselaer and Schuyler, not so much a bias against architectural critics, but a bias against New York's Knickerbocker families. Indeed, there is, amazingly, no entry for the word "Knickerbocker.") And so on.

Within individual entries, there are some strange omissions and errors. The entry for Herman Melville curiously fails to mention that he wrote *Moby-Dick*, with its opening passages marvelously evoking nineteenth-century maritime New York, or "Bartleby the Scrivener," which is perhaps the New York story *par excellence*. The entry for Edith Wharton claims that *The House of Mirth* was based on Mrs. Wharton's own childhood, which is of course quite wrong, as any of the scores of this city's Wharton experts and fans would know. (The author of the entry must have been thinking of *The Age of Innocence*, but in a town lousy with Wharton pedants it's a whopper of an error.)

If I seem a tad harsh in my appraisal of *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, I want to say again that it has largely to do with expectations. Had this work simply appeared without fanfare, one might have been thrilled to get one's hands on it. Even as it is, the book is a worthwhile investment for anyone seriously interested in New York history. Its thumbnail corporate and institutional histories should prove enormously useful, and its entries on matters political and governmental are judicious and informative. Two lengthy entries that stand out in my mind are Simon Baatz on "Science" and Henry Hope Reed on "Hor-

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ticulture": each is an elegantly concise redaction of its vast subject.

New York is a great subject and would seem to demand a treatment that matches its depth and richness. Alas, "New York" as construed by academia is less a subject than an epistemological morass, a condition duly reflected by *The Encyclopedia of New York City*. Its makers' apparent uninterest in the men and women who early on set an intellectually respectable agenda for the new discipline of New York history is but another of the sad examples of the academic arrogance that is a hallmark of our time.

The indomitable Irishry

Julian Moynahan Anglo–Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture. Princeton University Press, 288 pages, $24.95

reviewed by Richard Tillinghast

Hybrids, as horticulturists know, sometimes produce the most brilliant blossoms in the garden. Hybridization in human culture, particularly in the arts, can also have memorable results. Anglo–Irish writing, from Maria Edgeworth to William Trevor, has been one of the glories of literary art; but the term "Anglo–Irish" can be confusing, because it is sometimes applied to all literature in English by Irish writers—as distinguished from literature in the Irish language, which is considerable.

Julian Moynahan, in his comprehensive and satisfyingly readable study subtitled "The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture," defines his subject as follows: "Anglo–Irish literature is the writing produced by that ascendant minority in Ireland, largely but not entirely English in point of origin, that tended to be Protestant and overwhelmingly loyal to the English crown, and had its power and privileges secured by the English civil and military presence." In political and economic terms the Protestant Ascendancy's golden age came during the last decades of the eighteenth century, when the Irish Parliament asserted its power as an independent governing body. This coincided with an inspired building boom which made Dublin one of the great Georgian capitals in Europe.

"Something shattering would have to happen," Moynahan writes, "to awaken the Ascendancy to reality and to show its members how they actually stood toward the English and toward their fellow-Irish before a genuine Anglo–Irish literature . . . could get under way." With almost uncanny timing the first demonstrably Anglo–Irish novel, *Castle Rackrent* by Maria Edgeworth, was published in 1800, the fateful year of the Act of Union, when the Ascendancy doomed itself to eventual extinction by voting, under heavy pressure from England, aided by thousands of pounds in bribes, for the dissolution of the Dublin parliament.

In addition, during the period under consideration the underpinnings of Anglo–Irish power were steadily being eroded. Advocates of Home Rule were making their voices heard in the Parliament at Westminster. The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 brought the previously disenfranchised majority into the political realm. Think of the implications of the following statement made by the Chief Chancellor of Ireland in the eighteenth century: "The law does not suppose any such person to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic"! Eighteen thirty-eight saw Parliament deny the (Protestant) Church of Ireland its right to exact tithes from the largely Roman Catholic population, and in the 1860s the Church of Ireland was disestablished. The great famines of the 1840s depopulated the land through starvation, disease, and immigration, bankrupting the landlord class, whose rents depended on the decimated peasantry. These disasters were followed by the mid-century land wars and finally by Gladstone's Land Law Act of 1881. Inexorably during the nineteenth century "the Ascendancy," in Moynahan's words,

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"becomes a Descendancy." Its literary golden age came during its long period of decline in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

While Moynahan could perhaps have begun his story seventy-five years earlier, with Jonathan Swift, he argues persuasively for *Castle Rackrent* as the work that laid the groundwork for the Anglo–Irish literary tradition. Readers familiar with this literature will experience a shock of recognition upon reading a "check list of characteristics, if not a paradigm," that Moynahan draws up in his chapter on Maria Edgeworth, finding a set of common themes and concerns that pertain throughout the roughly two hundred years of its history—characteristics that are already present in Maria Edgeworth's writings. Without going over Moynahan's list item by item, I am largely basing my discussion on his almost-paradigm.

Prominent on his check list is "a focus on the fortunes or misfortunes of the rural proprietors and their families in the isolated estate houses of the Irish country districts as Anglo–Irish power and authority begin their long contraction and decline." The scenes of this body of literature are largely drawn from the countryside, and the rural settings lead naturally to another characteristic: a sense of loneliness and isolation which help form that ethos which Yeats would define as "Anglo–Irish solitude."

The Anglo–Irish did not create an urban literature. By contrast James Joyce, a contemporary of Somerville and Ross, wrote one of the great urban novels, *Ulysses* (published three years before *The Big House of Inver*). It's interesting to speculate about the cultural differences that led Joyce to write a walkabout novel, naming his character after a legendary wanderer, at the same time that members of the more established Irish ruling class focused on place and habitation. While the term "big house literature" ("big house" being the description of a house occupied by the gentry or aristocracy in Ireland) does not exhaust a taxonomy of their literary output, it goes far in that direction. It is striking how many novels by members of this class—planters and settlers, administrators, country gentlemen, daughters of gentry families—concern themselves with, are even named after, houses.

Starting with Maria Edgeworth's fictional *Castle Rackrent*, the genre was distinguished later in the course of its development by books like *The Big House of Inver* by Somerville and Ross and *Bowen's Court* by Elizabeth Bowen. Moynahan's high opinion of Bowen is justified. "As time passes since her death in 1973," he writes, "we are beginning to see Elizabeth Bowen as one of very few great writers of prose fiction at work in Ireland and England between the end of the First World War and the end of the 1960s."

The mention of Bowen is a reminder that a large number of these writers were women. I have no explanation for this, except to suggest that literature was a nexus where the big houses and their daughters intersected. While the sons of Anglo–Irish families typically entered the law or the church, or became officers in the armed forces, the daughters were often left at home to manage the house, which over and over again is depicted as a burden.

The battle between man-made habitation and the punishing Irish weather is a recurring motif in this literature. For Somerville and Ross as well as for Elizabeth Bowen, writing became an attempt—successful for the former, ultimately futile for the latter—to save the family house, without which Anglo–Irish identity threatened to dissolve, leaving them stranded amongst and undistinguished from the "mere Irish." The consciousness of decline and ruination, as in the literature of the American South, gives these stories of collapsing houses and old families gone to seed the poignancy of elegy and the dignity of classical tragedy.

As colorful and admirable and appealing as the authors of and characters in these books can be—particularly given that we are viewing the class through its own eyes—it is well to remember that the Anglo–Irish were a ruling class imposed on the native pop-

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ulation by the English Crown. That land forcibly taken from the Irish beginning in Elizabethan times was then rented back to them, remains an injustice that cannot be explained away. Dated, polemical, and partially discredited as it may be, *The Hidden Ireland* (1924) by Daniel Corkery is helpful in providing the other side of the Irish story.

There is evidence of affectionate relations between some tenants and some landlords, and in the countryside even today people remember which were the "good" landlords and which were the "bad." Rents were allowed to go unpaid in many cases, and during the Famine some landlords bankrupted themselves in an effort to save their tenants. Famous examples exist of landlords who died after contracting famine fever (typhus) while nursing their tenants. Two men who died in this way were Lady Gregory's father-in-law and Thomas Martin of Ballynahinch, a relation of Martin Ross. In addition, the Anglo–Irish landlords have the reputation of having been more humane than the native Irish middlemen or "grabbers" who bought up their estates during the nineteenth century.

Still, the Anglo–Irish remained, to a greater or lesser degree, interlopers. Referred to in the Irish language as "strangers" or simply "English," they stoutly regarded themselves as Irish and had very ambivalent attitudes toward England. A good place to get a sense of this dilemma, this source of cultural schizophrenia, is *The Last September*, Elizabeth Bowen's book about the Troubles of the 1920s. In a passage quoted by Moynahan, the young heroine Lois looks down on the big house called Danielstown, modeled on Bowen's Court, from the mountains:

> The house seemed to be pressing down low in apprehension, hiding its face, as though it had her vision of where it was. It seemed to huddle its trees close in fright and amazement at the wide light lovely unloving country, the unwilling bosom whereon it was set.

Moynahan, with a good eye for metaphor, comments: "She sees the estate as a jewel; others [the IRA], spying from the mountains and attacking from under the protective dusk of dense trees, see instead the chains by which jewels like Danielstown hung upon the 'unwilling bosom' of the country."

Anglo–Irish estrangement from their country of residence, as strangers in a strange land, was the source both of their existential insecurity and of a heightened awareness that gives their literature its edge. They developed, according to Moynahan, a "fascination, often a nervous one, with the lives of the 'peasantry,' that majority population of native Irish people who live surrounding and subordinate to the landlord class." One might question how Moynahan is able to get away with including William Carleton among the Anglo–Irish, since he was not of planter stock. Still the title of Carleton's masterpiece, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830–33), is indicative of the "attitude of research" which the Anglo–Irish took toward the lives of the people. And this is one of the attitudes that links the Anglo–Irish to the ruling classes of colonized countries throughout the world.

The less knowledgeable a commentator is, however, the more likely he will be to try to link the Irish dilemma with colonialism or to speak of the country today as a "post-colonial" phenomenon. Moynahan wipes the floor with Edward Said's Field Day pamphlet, *Yeats and Decolonization*, in which "Ireland is presented as an overseas (!) territory victimized by systematic British imperialism and struggling to 'decolonize' itself according to ideological blueprints derived from Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1965)."

Whatever one's attitudes about the British Empire—and my own are nuanced and ambivalent—even the most convinced Anglophile must shake his head in disbelief at Britain's actions toward Ireland over the centuries: The brutality, for instance, with which Irish partisans in the 1798 Rising (brought to a wide audience by the great

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historical novelist Thomas Flanagan's best seller *The Year of the French*) were massacred, while the French officers who had led them were billeted in the best hotels in Dublin while awaiting repatriation; Britain's studied, Malthusian indifference to the starvation of hundreds of thousands of people during the Famine. Even an action as recent as the Major government's release of a British soldier who had been convicted of murdering a teenaged girl in Northern Ireland in the summer of 1995 just days before the start of the infamous "marching season"—which seemed calculated to incite riots in the province and endanger the peace process. It is hard to know whether to attribute this pattern of behavior to indifference or pure stupidity.

The Anglo–Irish were, of course, painfully aware of British callousness and incomprehension. Much of the humor in Somerville and Ross's stories comes from their strategy of placing the visiting Englishman in a position to misinterpret Irish life comically. The Honourable Basil Leigh Kelway in "Lisheen Races, Second-hand," for instance, comes over on a junket, "collecting statistics . . . connected with the liquor question in Ireland," telling his friend, now an Irish R.M., that "he thought of popularizing the subject in a novel, and therefore intended to, as he put it, 'master the brogue' before his return."

But what were they to do? Their very existence depended, as Moynahan makes plain, on being backed up by British might. The assessment of their position offered by a commentator on the famine of 1848 is harsh but has the ring of truth to it:

> They form no class of the Irish people or any other people. Strangers they are in the land they call theirs, strangers here and strangers everywhere, owning no country and owned by none; rejecting Ireland and rejected by England; tyrants to this island and slaves to another; here they stand . . . alone in the world and alone in its history, a class by themselves.

The bleakness of this view shows the background against which the immense achievement of Anglo–Irish literature was created. Year by year from 1800 on, as their position became less and less tenable, the heart and pluck and humor of those whom Yeats called "the indomitable Irishry" built from words a hybrid literature that will stand with the world's best.

Anglo–Ireland and its literature have flowered and gone to seed, dried up and blown away. Their legacy, though, has to some extent hybridized itself into the continuing vitality of Ireland's literary culture. Seamus Heaney has gone to school both to Carleton and to Yeats. Though there is nothing hyphenated about his own imagination, Heaney, like Carleton, Somerville and Ross, Bowen, and Yeats, has sometimes functioned as an interpreter of his own culture for a larger English-speaking readership. His mediation between the homely and the cosmopolitan, which was at the core of Anglo–Irish literature, is given voice in the poem "Making Strange." The poem tells of bringing a visitor to his home country. "I found myself driving the stranger," he writes,

> through my own country, adept
> at dialect, reciting my pride
> in all that I knew, that began to make strange
> at that same recitation.

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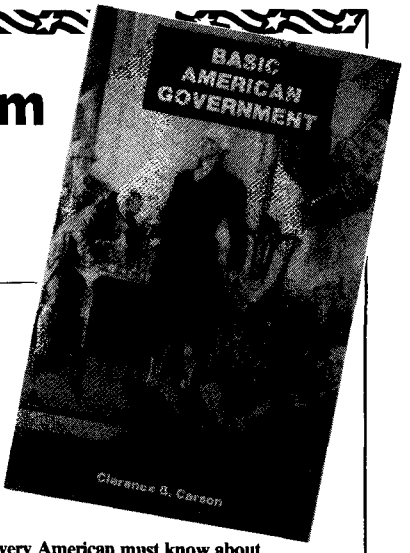

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